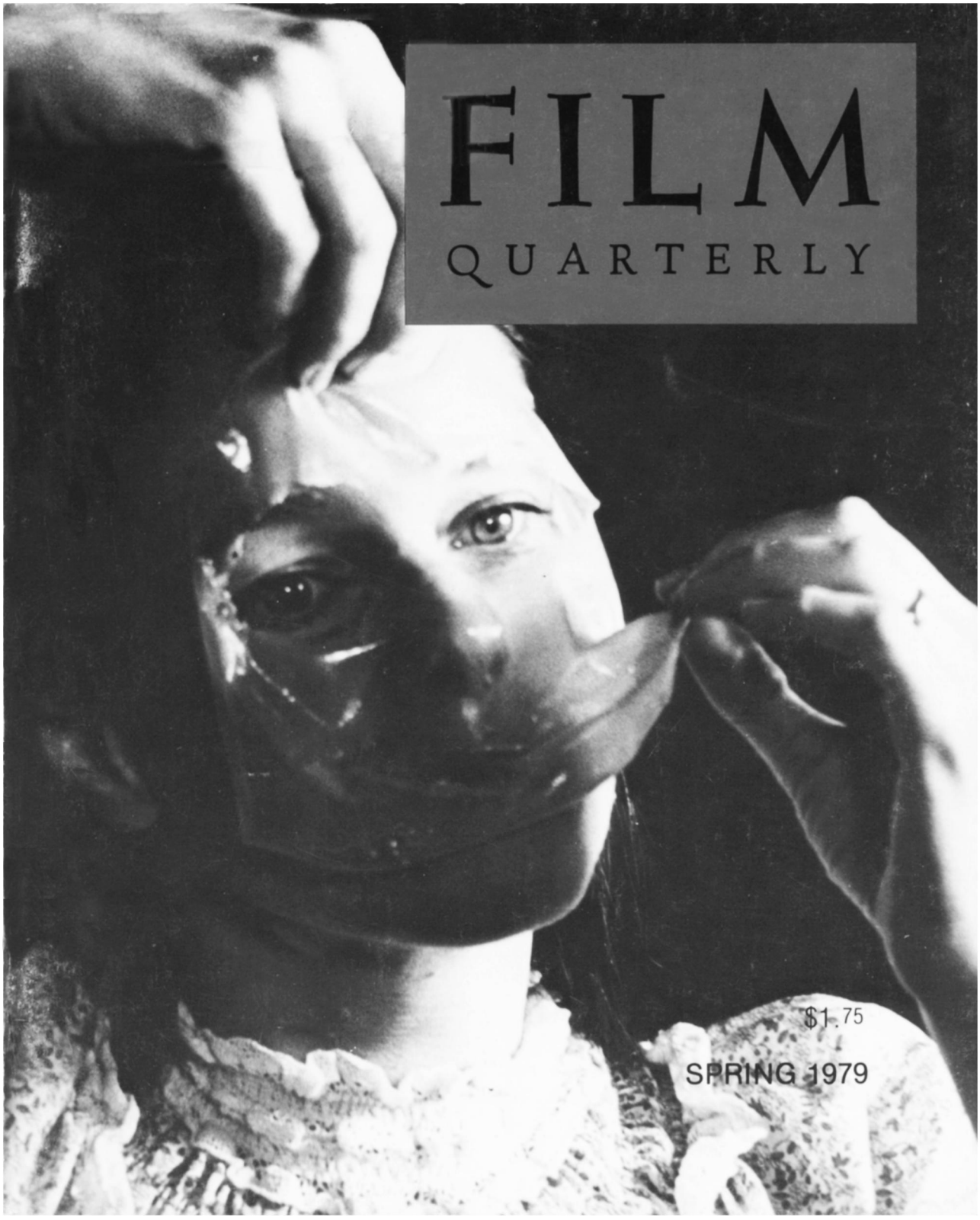
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DAN YAKIR

The Magical Mystery World of Claude Chabrol: An Interview

Stylistically, what alternative do your films propose to French cinema?

I've always tried to hold on to the cinema of genre, because I think it's the only way to make films. These days in France, but not only there, one veers mostly toward an overly intellectual vision of things, and I think the only solution is to make some good *policiers,* some good soap-operas and comedies. At this moment, there's the disastrous influence of Godard who is a genius but who is quite alone, and all those who imitate him are really annoying.

What did the New Wave—if one accepts it as as aesthetic and economic movement—give French cinema?

Lots of worries . . . It was an economic movement, which is always the same: we had no money, so it was an economic problem. There was no unity of inspiration, but rather a unity of rejection of certain things. There was an influence of American cinema, which I find very healthy, but very soon, instead of trying to bring into this existing cinematic structure what they could, they eliminated and betrayed their teacher—they tried to make films which were no longer genre films. I think it's very bad. Fortunately, cinema is still a popular art and we need people to go see films: they'll go to see a *policier,* a love story. Often, people just don't understand the films they are shown.

I've heard the accusation that members of the New Wave, like Truffaut and yourself, are making the same kind of films you used to attack before.

It's not true, of course. It's stupid! If it happens, it is to make, accidentally, a parody of this kind of film, but that's all. If one doesn't see the parody . . . Frankly, it's not at all possible.

What do you think of the way directors like Rohmer, Resnais, and Godard have developed?

Godard's case is apart, because his is an intolerable cinema—except by himself, because he has genius. When he's in shape, it's superb. It's never great for a long time, because it's not the kind of cinema one can sit through for an hour and a half. But for 20-30 minutes, it's an extraordinary cinema.

As to Rohmer or Resnais, I feel closer to them because I know them better. Let's say . . . *Merde,* I'll say what I think! I reproach them for not trying to make popular films. Yes, even Rohmer. It's not that he doesn't want to—he can't. He just doesn't have the right mind for a large public. The success of his films—and we've spoken about it, the two of us—has always been caused by misunderstanding. The titles of his films: *My Night at Maud's, La Collectionneuse, Claire's Knee, Chloe in the Afternoon,* give the impression of being obscene, and people go to see these obscenities but they get something else . . . It's only the titles: *The Marquise of O*—it sounds like a whore . . .

And Truffaut?

He has no problems. I didn't like *Small Change.* I find the criticism he made about children's films . . . when he made fun of *Forbidden Games,* for example, he was very precise, but I think he fell a bit in the same trap in *Small Change.* Well, he wanted to make a film that would be assured of success in France. It's a cinematic strategy that he has. But I like the fact that although he tries to change, he never does. I say it more as a compliment than as a reproach. He really tries to change his kind of films. He has two lines: the *Jules and Jim* line, and the *400 Blows* line. He also has a less interesting, Hitchcockian line—*The Bride Wore Black, La Sirène de Mississippi*—because

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he's enormously influenced by Hitchcock. Even *Small Change* seems to me very influenced by Hitchcock in terms of the way of shooting . . . It's OK when he doesn't deal with subjects that are *policiers,* but when he does—one gets the impression of a copy of Hitchcock, an almost involuntary copy . . .

Let's talk about Hitchcock.

He doesn't make films anymore. He's working on a script which takes place in Finland in winter. With his pacemaker, he won't be able to see it through. He'll kill himself, like Molière. It frightens me. I liked *Family Plot* very much, especially when the guy in the garage hides behind the door and finds himself outside in the street . . .

In your book about Hitchcock, you spoke about the transfer of guilt and the reversal of roles, which are present in your films as well.

Yes, I think that they are more present in my films than in Hitchcock's. Of course, it exists in Hitchcock, but we pushed it a bit . . . I don't think that the core of his films is automatically the transfer of guilt. It must interest him, because he's dealt with the subject several times, but I don't think it interests him above all . . . And don't ask me what interests him above all, because I couldn't answer.

Why your interest in this principle?

It interests me to the extent that I believe in the *revelation* of guilt. There is a certain amount of guilt in every individual—it's the real Original Sin—and I noticed that guilt is always transferred from the most guilty to the least guilty. It's never the other way around. So, in a way, the act of the guilty releases him from his culpability: it's enough to commit the act to be able to transmit it to somebody else. In *Violette,* she has practically no remorse. She never regrets her deed and still manages to give a feeling of guilt to her mother and all the people around her—and she's the one who kills!

Do you agree with the view that divides some of your films along the inspiration of Lang and others along that of Hitchcock? In Que La Bête Meure *there's a very Langian element of fate.*

Yes, *Que la Bête Meure* (This Man Must Die) is mostly Langian.

And La Femme Infidèle *is more Hitchcockian?*

I don't think so. I don't consider Lang and

QUE LE BETE MEURE

Hitchcock from a thematic point of view. I consider them in terms of style, and in this I'm much closer to Lang than to Hitchcock. Hitchcock tries to convey a story subjectively—everything is based on the subjectivity of the character, while Lang seeks the opposite, to objectify all the time. I try to objectify too. It's characteristic of Hitchcock—even the titles of his films always bear on his personal psychology: *Shadow of a Doubt, Suspicion, Psycho* . . . They all have to do with personal, individual things. In Lang, it's *Human Desire*—it's never individual. Intellectually—in terms of pleasure derived—I was more influenced by Hitchcock than by Lang. The thing that strikes me enormously—it's a unique case in the history of cinema—is a great film-maker making a remake of two films by another great film-maker: it was Lang in relation to Renoir. *La Bête Humaine* became *Human Desire* and *La Chienne* became *Scarlet Street.* At first glance, there is no greater difference between two film-makers than between Renoir and Lang, but it isn't true. There is a greater difference between Renoir and Hitchcock, and even Hitchcock and Lang, than between Renoir and Lang. One can't imagine Hitchcock making a remake of Renoir. It's unthinkable.

What is the difference between your own scripts and the ones you wrote with Gégauff, or those he wrote himself?

In general, I write for three reasons: (1) I have an idea and I see no reason to give it to someone else, though I don't like writing, it bores me—I detest it. (2) I read a book and decide to

adapt it faithfully, with no intention of changing much, so I see no reason to pay—even if it's a friend who may need the money—since I just intend to copy the book. I do this too . . . (3) For example, *Violette* is a film I wanted to shoot for a long time: about Violette Nozière, the girl who poisoned her father and mother in 1934. Since it deals with what goes on in her mind, I preferred to have a woman do it—Odile Barski. This is a special case.

Do you find in Gégauff something that you want to say, but that he can maybe say better?

That's it. What I like in Paul is that he's quite crazy. I'm crazy too, but it's *la folie sage,* which is not his case. He often has ideas that are extraordinarily courageous. He's one of those people—and I admire it very much—who, when they have a problem of tying up something, they're not taken aback by it. In *Que la Bête Meure* we had a problem as to how to justify the fact that this guy, by coincidence, tracks down the killer. So, Paul just said it was by coincidence. It was terrific. He's very good at that. He's also good at . . . he says he refuses to write polished dialogue, but as soon as I need dialogue which is a bit polished —I hate it and don't know how to write it—I go to him. I'm good at writing dialogue for fools, and he's good with dialogue for intelligent people. I tell him: "Paul, here they have to be intelligent." So, he does it. If they are fools, I keep them and do it myself—I'm absolutely unbeatable at that . . .

There's something classical about the scripts you've written—La Femme Infidèle, La Rupture, Le Boucher, Juste avant la Nuit—*something very gracious.*

It's a matter of construction. I love that. It's my great pleasure. I construct very quickly; I'm good at that. That's why it's classical: because it's constructed.

How did you construct a film like Le Boucher?

The construction of *Le Boucher* was based on two ideas: the depth, which was in the area, in the earth-bed—the grottos, because they were there—and the sun, the morning sun. From then on, it was very easy—I mixed the two with the characters and it came about all by itself.

The only dramatic element in *Le Boucher* is the cigarette lighter. It's from the lighter that things begin to . . .(1) The lighter is offered. (2) The lighter is found on the cliff-top. So, the conclusion: it's the said lighter. (3) No, it's not the one. (4) Yes, it is. So, it's very easy. I adore symmetry, I love symmetrical things . . .

I think it's an interior need that balances . . . Internally, psychologically, I seek to maintain my equilibrium while my natural tendency is toward imbalance. So, the search for symmetry in things helps me in doing that. There's only Hercule Poirot who's like me—he adores symmetry too. But I'm not for simple symmetry. Symmetry doesn't mean putting one chandelier on the right and another on the left!

You have often used the melodrama as a vehicle to express a quite tragic vision of life.

Yes, I adore melodramas. All films are melodramas to the extent that you put some music in . . . Only Rohmer doesn't use any music in his films. I find melodramas moving. When there are moving elements—like a woman who loses her child—one can take a distance, on condition that the film doesn't turn out cold. I prefer this to the other way around . . . I saw the first film by John Frankenheimer, *The Young Stranger,* which is great, but there's a moment when he returns home, goes up the stairs—and there's this terribly dramatic music—opens the refrigerator, and takes out an . . . apple! I prefer this to having him find a corpse in the refrigerator: his mother's corpse, for example . . .

You have also used the roman policier *as a similar vehicle. Why do you find it useful to express a tragic vision?*

Because I've always liked the *roman policier.* I think that practically all *romans policiers* have

◀ Le Boucher

a metaphysical side to them, to the extent that there's either a mystery with a capital M or a villain who has to be destroyed. This is pure metaphysics. It interests people: to open the fridge door and discover the body of an old woman . . . It interests them for a while.

Is it mostly as a vehicle to express your vision of life or rather the mechanism of suspense that appeals to you?

I'm interested in it because the form itself expresses something. The principle of the *film policier* itself expresses something. Afterwards, you can add all kinds of things to it—tell the history of the world from its origins to our time: this doesn't bother anybody. But what happens to the spectator is that he doesn't fall asleep . . . It mustn't be too complicated or else you lose a lot of time trying to unravel it, which is annoying. But when it's not complicated, it's OK, it's a bit like . . . I'm not saying that the message should be bitter, but when you have a bitter pill to swallow, you put some chocolate around it, as you do with children and cats . . . You can do that in a good *policier.*

You have said you're optimistic, but your vision of the world seems to me quite pessimistic: in your films, evil lurks everywhere while virtue is rare.

Ah, it's very true!

But at the same time, your vision is also curiously humorous.

Virtue is always a bit ridiculous because it's such a rare flower that, first, it has such a hard time surviving, and then, it's rather dull . . .

Marie-Chantal contre Dr. Kah *and* La Rupture *are the only films where you have a completely virtuous heroine.*

Yes, In *La Rupture,* she's even more virtuous because she has suffered, while Marie-Chantal is innocent, a *naive.*

You don't have a male hero who is virtuous in this way . . .

A virtuous man, no. Not yet. Ah, I have one: Donald Sutherland in *Blood Relatives.* It's really the story of a virtuous man. It's curious: a virtuous cop!

Because he does things for others or for himself?

He tries to do something for others, and a bit

Donald Sutherland reflected in BLOOD RELATIVES.

for himself. It's a man who tries to understand himself, who tries to behave decently. There is a limit to virtue: to just let things be. The enemy of virtue is preaching, and if you don't agree with the lesson . . . Things aren't as clear-cut as that.

But in a film like Une Partie de Plaisir, *I feel there's a "message"—against self-sacrifice, for healthy self-interest. If everybody took care of his own interest, it would be better for all . . .*

I have an old theory that this thought has to be divided half and half. Half for oneself and half for the others. This is healthy. Otherwise, it's very difficult. One has to be a bit selfish.

In Que la Bête Meure, *there is an ambiguous situation (one isn't sure if the hero is going to die at the end) as well as a moral ambiguity (the victim-hero isn't all that pure himself). Is ambiguity an important principle for you?*

It's not the ambiguity which is important. It's the . . . I abhor judges. They frighten me. They judge according to what? This is why my "great testament," my "definitive message" is that imported phrase: Don't judge! One has to avoid judgments to avoid traps, but this is not always easy. One judges in any case, but this judgment shouldn't have too great an import or consequence. Judgments are always made in relation to the self, even with judges and members of the jury. What one demands of jurors is terrible: an intimate conviction. "Beyond a reasonable doubt" is really a phrase that frightens me . . .

And yet good and evil are often well-defined in your films!

They mix. Laws aren't that simple. If good gains, it doesn't mean that it will also triumph, and if evil sweeps it along, it doesn't imply its victory. The battle between good and evil is more complicated. The principle is: when there's a character who is nice and another who is evil—for example, in *Le Boucher,* which is a limited case and a very simple one: there's the bad butcher and the nice teacher. But you can say that the butcher sometimes has more virtue than the teacher, that he tries to love her but she refuses. He gives her presents. She only gives him a lighter, a kiss—it's not much: he is much more generous than she is. The notion of good and evil is always relative to something.

How about characters who are completely negative, like Michel Bouquet in La Rupture, *Jean Yanne in* Que la Bête Meure *or Akim Tamiroff in* Marie-Chantal contre Dr. Kah? *Is it to caricaturize?*

There, yes. Tamiroff in *Marie-Chantal* is both the good Dr. Lambaré and the bad Dr. Kah. He is both, so good and evil are in the same person. The case of Bouquet in *La Rupture* is less about the theory of evil than about the theory of rule: he's a man blinded and misled by his principles. For him, things are no longer within the realm of judgment. He can't be considered evil, because he doesn't reason his evil. He tries to do good—he does evil because he doesn't consider the character of Stéphane as a human being, but for his son and grandson he is capable of anything. As to Yanne in *Que la Bête Meure,* he himself saw the character as very sympathetic and the others as ignoble. Look at his qualities: he's generous, open, a good son to his mother. The only thing that's terrible is his incredible egoism.

But he tortures his wife and son!

Tortures! She writes a stupid poem . . . And the son doesn't study and gets lousy grades. He spends a fortune on food and his wife doesn't prepare it right because she writes poems! He's right! And he offers a lucrative deal to Duchaussoy . . .

Still, do you see these characters as caricatures?

Yes, sometimes I make caricatures so the story will be sharper. But at the same time I also notice that one thinks they're caricatures and then one day in the street one sees people who are much worse, who are caricatures of this caricature. Let's say that these are people some of whose traits are more accentuated than others.

You once wrote in Cahiers du Cinéma *that the* film policier *carries the seeds of its own destruction. Can you elaborate?*

Yes, because people who wrote *policiers* obeyed the rules of the genre, but these rules are no rules but a mere convenience to keep or reject. The *roman policier* is dying, because they followed the rules to such a point that it's always the same thing: it's like a bridge party where you look at the hand and make a diagnosis: this genre corresponds to this trick or another and there's never a surprise. Now the *roman policier* is enjoying a new birth, emerging from its ashes, because people have become a bit freer. You have to be flexible with the rules of the genre. When you make a *film policier,* you shouldn't try to find out whether it obeys the rules, whether it's orthodox or not. If you decide in the middle that it won't be a *policier,* you do something else. As was the case with classical tragedy, the absence of freedom in the *policier* brought about its death. Since there no longer was intelligent material, one invented things just to solicit. There's a guy called Mickey Spillane, whom I hate because, in theory, his novels were like those of Chandler and Hammett, and at the same time they were completely disgusting. They're really bad, without interest, stupid. Certainly, one later discovered that it was not the worst . . . Now they think it's not all that bad—still, it's an example of how decadent the genre can become.

You have often subverted the genre.

Yes, but it's not so much for the subversion . . . Let's say, I don't want to submit myself to a genre. I use it because it helps me or it seems practical. It's easier for me, but I don't want to become enslaved to it. I don't want to be a priest of the *roman policier.* I think one should be free to do what one wants. I reproach Truffaut for having too great a tendency, when he says: "I'll make a *film policier* based on William Irish" or something like that, to stick to the rules of

the genre. Unlike Hitchcock, who has always disregarded them. This is his great strength—he couldn't care less.

How about Blood Relatives?

It completely respects the rules of the genre. It's a book by Ed McBain, who is none other than the scriptwriter of *The Birds:* Evan Hunter. When I read the book, it didn't grab me because I realized who was guilty by the second page. And all this, because he obeyed the rules of the genre—I found the trump he was using. But at the same time I thought it was a great subject, so I was quite faithful and simply changed the characters a little bit. But the end result is not the same: it's the same story, but not quite the same subject. I pushed in another direction, which changed the outlook a bit.

What is the subject of the film?

It's the relationship of a 40-year-old cop with his daughter.

Does it develop through an inquiry?

Yes, but it's not even his daughter. We hardly see her. Her presence is there during the inquiry. She is 12, and there's another young girl in the story.

You seem to be quite interested in the relationship between parents and children. In almost all your films . . .

I'm interested in it to the extent that I'm a father myself. For more than 15 films, there were no children at all. I started putting children in my films only from the moment that I really felt myself to be a father. My own children grew up and the problem which they represented and which I could not resolve—I didn't study the problem and when I did, I had no solution. When I saw them growing up, I noticed that each gesture of your child has a symbolic value *vis-à-vis* yourself. It's as if it were a projection of yourself doing something. The power—even that of suppression—that a child has over you is superior to that of any other person. This is why I used children as elements representing what one calls "bourgeois stability" and when these elements are shattered in some way . . . In my films, one tortures children a lot: in *La Rupture,* he's thrown at the wall right away. In *Une Partie de Plaisir,* the torture is even more terrifying because Paul Gégauff interrogates his daughter

La Rupture

about her mother and gives her messages for her. I find it's an extraordinary representation of the characters themselves—a revelation of sorts. The relations with children and the torture children have to bear—it's violent and it fascinates me. In *La Femme Infidèle,* it's double torture: the mother tortures the boy when she throws down his puzzle and the kid tortures his parents by saying "I detest you."

Let's talk about Violette's relations with her parents and the shifting system of alliances within that family.

What I tried to show is that she and her mother seek each other. I show it by kisses: either Violette wants to kiss her mother and her mother doesn't or her mother wants to kiss her and Violette no longer wants to. They have great difficulty getting through to each other. There's a much less difficult rapport between Violette and her father. The scenes where she's alone with him are much calmer and more "normal" than the ones with her mother. And yet, it's her father she kills. This is a great mystery for me: why she kills him rather than her mother. The only thing that made me ask the question is that maybe it's true that he tried to rape her, but I don't believe it. As to the relationship between the Nozière parents, the father always indulges his daughter and the mother is always stern. This is because the father accepts his daughter as she appears to him while the mother wants her daughter to accomplish things she dreams about.

You have often criticized the family and yet you've said you are not against it.

No, I'm for it, but I criticize it because it's

lamentable. A family is the people you love. I have a family of 30 people and if I add my children . . . It's very pleasant, but I think it's mostly European, or even French . . .What's frightening is that there's a father, a mother, and children who are all pressed together—it's disgusting. The father keeps an eye on the female next door, the grandmother . . . , the children . . . It's disgusting, frightening! I don't see how people can live that way—and yet it has such strength. It's masochistic; they're unhappy but it endures.

You have made many films where the existence of the couple is invaded by a third person, often the woman's lover. What do you find most interesting in that domain: the power struggle between the three?

No, it's not that. What amuses me is to create an imbalance in a universe that tries hard to stabilize itself. But it's crazy: there can be no equilibrium *à trois,* so it's the suppression of one of the three which causes the imbalance. In fact, I'm not particularly interested in triangles, but this is what people are familiar with most. You can do a lot of things with a sexual triangle and, at the same time, it's very simple—everybody knows what it is: the woman makes a phone call and hastily hangs up when her husband enters. Everyone understands that. No need to add a scene to explain what has happened. It's very practical, which is why I use it . . . It's also very French . . .

What do you find interesting in a relationship: the facade, its cracking, or its explosion?

Both interest me. The facade is interesting because it's the social fabric and the cracking is interesting because it's the truth. Maybe it's my pessimistic side, but I can't imagine one without the other.

What is the great evil of bourgeois life? Mediocrity?

It's mostly its extraordinary egoism. Bourgeois life is entirely conceived in egoism, like an old candy that one finds and which is completely . . .

What is the function of the meal scenes in your films?

The meal, for the most part, is the moment when people are united. The father works, the mother is out shopping, the children are at school, but they're united at the dinner table. When a man wants to sleep with a woman, he doesn't say: "Come, sleep with me!" He says: "Let's grab a bite in a restaurant." The meal, then, has a very important function, so I put a lot of meal scenes in my films.

But I noticed that in most of my films—and it irritated me greatly—people never eat, or very little. In *Blood Relatives,* there are small meals—they're not very important, but there are nevertheless six. They gorge themselves all the time . . .

There are very few such scenes in La Rupture *or* Juste Avant la Nuit. *Is it in order to express something?*

When there are meals? It depends. For example, the most important one, the one in which there are the most things to see, is in *Que la Bête Meure,* because it's part of the character—the visceral side of the character.

Do you always intend to make funny films, even when they're serious?

Yes. I always try to make my films funny, with some rare exceptions. *Le Boucher* or even *La Rupture* may have amusing moments, but they don't try to be funny, while *Juste Avant la Nuit* is, in fact, a comic film. It's really vaudeville material transformed into tragedy. It's about a character who wants to confess and people say: "Shut up! Shut up!" It's subject matter that could have very well been used in a comedy. But the film is funnier if comic material is treated in an austere way.

What is the role of politics in your films? For example, Nada *is a critique of the corruption and sadism of the police as well as the brutality of the anarchists.*

JUSTE AVANT LA NUIT ▶

Danièle and Paul Gégauff in UNE PARTIE DE PLAISIR

Yes, but it's not anarchists—it's terrorists. I don't see the difference between terrorists and beasts. They behave in the same way.

Why your interest in the themes of manipulation and the use of power?

It's a will not to let power impose itself. Power is the most twisted, the most evil, the purest . . . What was misunderstood about *Nada,* which treated that, is that it's not the political stand taken—the extreme left, like the terrorists, or the extreme right, like the policeman or Goémont: in any case, the state crushes. The state is the master of he who destroys it, not of its supporters. Another phrase which applies to *Nada* is: the state prefers its own destruction, and the death of all, to the revolution. It's true.

And in Les Biches? *What starts as a sexual attraction between the two women ends up as manipulation and power struggle.*

Of course but, alas, if it's a power struggle, I'd be entirely for Why. But it isn't really a power struggle. It's a revolution: the replacement of one class by another—Why replaces Frédérique, but she does it by *becoming* Frédérique.

But you also show the attraction of fascism in Les Cousins *and* Une Partie de Plaisir.

Yes, but this is Gégauff's side. He loves to pass for a fascist. When I want to have a portrait of a fascist, I call Gégauff. In *Une Partie de Plaisir,* he plays one himself.

You have said: "The real center could be a form of Marxism for the 20th century."

Yes, but I speak of Europe because the US is quite different. In France and the rest of Europe, where the existing social structure is strongly disputed by at least half the individuals, and people think of changing it, I think that the real center is no more right-wing than the left. The center-left is as rightist as . . . I think that the real center will be a sort of modern Marxism. I didn't say it would be the solution. There'll be problems, but it will be the center. The center-right will court the liberals. The left will be leftist anarchists, but it's already like that: terrorists, who are pro-Albanian . . .

You often use social origin as indicative of victimization: the heroines of La Rupture *and* Une Partie de Plaisir.

Up to a point, yes. If there are men, women are the victims. This I admit quite willingly, given what the poor things have to bear. To the extent that women are victims, it's more certain they'll be victims in a poor milieu than in a rich milieu. The rich are victims of other things, but it's less serious . . . Women in a modest milieu suffer terribly. It's not amusing at all. It's a cliché, but if they work all day in a factory and at night have to cook and wash—it's terrible! We men are monsters [laughs uncontrollably]. It's funny . . . If women don't laugh, I understand, but I find it funny . . .

How do you see the role of the camera? Does it make a comment on the characters or the situation?

If only I knew . . . I try to avoid—except when it's the purpose of the film—making the camera subjective in relation to the characters in the film. That is, directly subjective—to make the audience identify with one of the characters by the effect of the camera. Except when I want to play a trick—to make them identify with a character and then make them realize what horrible scoundrels they are. That amuses me . . . But otherwise, I think that the role of the camera is to give its own point of view on what is happening. Without going so far as to use the "pretty" vehicle of distanciation, which is heavy, let's say that a light step backward in relation to the story allows you to avoid a deterioration into bad taste, into grandiose affects.

With this system, when you use such grandiose effects, it becomes a farce. People laugh. It's very easy to manipulate the spectator. After

LA FEMME INFIDÈLE *(Michel Bouquet, Stephane Audran)*

Hitchcock manipulated the audience so brilliantly in *Psycho,* manipulation was no longer possible.

In the opening sequence of La Femme Infidèle, *the camera encircles the characters who are sitting at a table on the lawn. Why?*

It seeks them. The principle of *La Femme Infidèle* is that the movement always ends up by returning to its starting point, as if it never moved. At times, it moves to the left but returns to the right; at others, it advances but then recoils. It never returns from the same point, and it's what the character wants—to remain completely . . . He finds himself in his little happiness and he wants least of all to see it move . . . That's the subject of *La Femme Infidèle*—it becomes unbalanced and he pushes like crazy on the unbalanced side to re-establish balance. This movement back and forth was constantly compensated to such an extent that in the last shot I had to use both movements—forward and backward—which is physically impossible. This is why I cheated a bit: I used a zoom forward at the same time that I was moving backward.

And in A Double Tour?

It was the period of madness, because it was the beginning . . . I had a crane which could go very high up, so I amused myself with it like crazy. But it worked. I like taking a stand—any scene can be shot in at least two or three different ways. I detest what they do a lot in the US—the cover-shot. Why is it called that? I'm not cold . . . Even in what is called a master-shot, which is sufficient to tell a film, there are two or three different solutions. What's interesting is to choose a visual point of view which corresponds to the sense of what is to be done and preserve it all along. Contrarily to what one believes, it doesn't take your freedom away. With this stand you can do anything: you are not tied to a succession of automatic forms. You can go in whatever direction you want, because you have such a solid structure.

Violette *has a very complicated system of flashbacks.*

It's not very linear, but it's not very complicated. The film can be divided into three parts: the first is the longest, almost half the film—from the introduction of Violette, who comes out of the doorway in the very beginning up to the fatal dinner. She takes the bus. There, we have a flashback with almost chronological elements of her life, with the exception of childhood memories which take place in the beginning of the third part. It stops the moment she's about to commit the crime. She sees things in their chronology but still doesn't want to accept her deed. The minute it's about to arrive, in her memory, she stops the bus—which represents the line of memory—and walks on foot. From that moment, it's reality—we're in direct reality. She returns home and, of course, finds her parents dead, calls the neighbors, is interrogated by the police and slips away. She begins to have visions, a kind of depression, and accepts seeing the moment where she prepares the crime. In the first part, the only thing we see of the crime is when she tries to imitate her mother's handwriting, but not the poison. When she sleeps in her hotel room, she sees the preparation of the poison, but she still doesn't accept seeing the crime itself. We return to linearity—she stops it. Then, she's imprisoned and at that moment, when everything is over, she accepts seeing the crime itself. After that, she herself explores her past, the why of things.

Why are there so many close-ups in Violette?

There are two reasons. First, I didn't have the money to reconstruct the period in a grand manner. So, when I shot outdoors, I was obliged to condense the frames. Had I closed the frame outdoors but let the camera wander indoors, one would have felt I was forced to close the frame. If the frames are closed everywhere, the spectator isn't bothered by the outdoors enclosure. In addi-

Isabelle Huppert in VIOLETTE

tion, Isabelle Huppert's acting is extraordinarily internalized and one can only sense its subtlety when seen from very close. So, I had to use it anyway.

And in general, what is the function of the close-up?

To make what's inside pass through the eyes. The human face is a mystery. To pierce this mystery, there are two orifices, which are the eyes. One has to look into them. The close-up exists for that.

In *Violette,* I did it more or less systematically. In *Une Partie de Plaisir* too, there are lots of close-ups, for a much more perverse reason. Since Gégauff himself played the role, I tried while shooting him, to find what was real in his performance. He was acting but, still, it was something he knew first hand . . .. I wanted to find out to what extent he wanted to return to Danièle and to what extent she wanted to refuse. It was a bit like a psychodrama but, amusingly, with no results. When we started shooting, Danièle was very afraid of what Paul might do, and Paul had only one idea—to get her back. In the end, they hadn't changed at all: she still didn't want to live with him. Psychodramas can succeed when the individuals involved are slightly unbalanced, and Paul and Danièle were not unbalanced. So, nothing happened; it's very strange.

Why is L'Oeil du Malin *told from the point of view of Jacques Charrier?*

It was a film for which we had very little money and since the main character was extremely mean and petty, I told myself that if I made the film subjectively, from his point of view, the meanness of the character would justify the poverty of means. He is capable of imagining grand things, so he renders everything bitter, with malice, which is why I did it like that. I find it interesting to make a whole film pass . . . In general, it's always the hero who tells the story—or a witness. Here, it's a witness who ends up playing the main role, and who is ignoble, minuscule . . . It interested me to take the point of view of someone minuscule.

And in Que le Bête Meure?

There it's a trap. The first part is based on the diary of the character, because if the film had to be efficient, it needed an identification of the audience with Duchaussoy. It was very easy—one always identifies with a poor man whose child is dead and who wants revenge. The diary allows augmenting the spectator's identification until the reversal and the spectator ends up blaming him-

self: he has identified with the character and thought him good and wonderful, and now he perceives him as full of shadows. This enchants me. In the end of *Que la Bête Meure,* the construction is as if Duchaussoy kills Yanne. But the spectator completely rejects this idea of a mean and cowardly murder and prefers to accuse Yanne's son, who didn't kill. He makes the spectator create a transfer of guilt.

And the subjective sequences in A Double Tour? *The two flashbacks by the father (Jacques Dacqmine) and the son (André Jocelyn)?*

There was a problem of symmetry, of construction, with the two flashbacks: to make one flashback and then another, which shows what one doesn't see in the first. There was another thing: I tried—not all that well, I'd do it better now—something quite ambitious: the first flashback was from the point of view of Dacqmine, a man of 50 who lives a love and tries to grasp the beauty that has eluded him till now. I shot it in a certain way. The flashback of Jocelyn was the contrary—a man who can't tolerate the beauty of others. I tried to shoot it in a different way. What justifies the fact that after killing Leda he walks around the room and the camera goes behind perfume bottles and things change their color as he passes behind them is that it's a person who is cornered by, completely imprisoned by, the beauty that surrounds him. He can't escape it.

Do you prefer to work in color or in black and white?

I think the choice no longer exists. Unless you're very rich, you can't work in black and white—you must work in color. But from time to time I do feel like working in B&W. *Blood Relatives* could be shot in B&W: I could have shot it in false colors at the risk of making everything all-black or all-white, or used color and got B&W, but I decided it would be stupid to make an effort to eliminate color, so I shot it in color.

Rohmer told me that everything had already been done in B&W while there's still a lot to do in color. Franju, on the other hand, told me one could not even get a proper shadow in color.

They're both right, but also wrong. It's true that everything has already been done in B&W and there are still things to do in color, but Rohmer was wrong in forgetting that most things in B&W were done using film stock completely different from ours, which enables us to do things we couldn't do before. It also prevents us from doing other things—it's a completely different B&W.

As to color, Franju is wrong in claiming one can't use a shadow. One can, and perfectly well too. Most cameramen are afraid of B&W. I know only four who accept absolute black. With the others, it's never quite black, and it's a pity because black is very beautiful. There are three Americans and one Frenchman who can do it. Since I couldn't get the Americans, I used the Frenchman.

You often use blue: in La Rupture, La Femme Infidèle: *even the interiors of Gégauff's house in* Une Partie de Plaisir *were blue. Is it indicative of decadence?*

Yes, but blue is above all the color of madness, a form of madness. A psychiatrist once told me that the dominant color in the drawings and paintings of the mentally deranged is blue. I thought it was strange: "How could it be blue, which is such a calm color?" And he said: "No, think about it; try to imagine living perpetually in blue." It's the most unbalanced, and unbalancing, color. *Voilà!* So, when I wanted to show imbalance, I used blue—to please that psychiatrist, whom I like quite a bit . . . And it's true that it has a strange effect.

Les Biches *opened a brilliant period in your career. The six films you made in the period 1968–1971 are among your best. Can you describe the process that led you in that direction?*

◀ A Double Tour

My first three films (*Le Beau Serge, Les Cousins, A Double Tour*) did quite well and then I had four terrible disasters (*Les Bonnes Femmes, Les Godelureaux, L'Oeil du Malin, Ophélia*). I was obliged to make the films that were offered to me.

The Tiger *films?*

Yes, films like that. It was a useful experience, because when I could once more make the films I wanted, I brought with me what I had learned while making those films. I could work faster, making one film after another. It was a good situation which later turned sour because the producer, André Genovès, went crazy with delusions of grandeur . . . But other than that it was fine. When you're given the possibility to do what you want, it's good; but if you could always do what you want, you could even become lazy . . .

Why did you decide to shoot Blood Relatives *in English, with a star like Donald Sutherland? In the past, films like* The Champagne Murders, Ten Days' Wonder, Dirty Hands, *and* The Twist (Folies Bourgeoises), *which were shot in English, were not very successful.*

Yes, it's absolutely true, but those were "bastard films." I shot them in France with both English and French actors, and the French didn't speak English. There was no real reason . . . It created complications. *Blood Relatives* takes place in a North American milieu, in Montreal, so there are three French actors: the mother (Stéphane Audran), the son (Laurent Malet), and the daughter (Aude Landry), who keep their French accent, but the father is English, so they speak English, which is perfectly normal. All the others are Anglo-Saxon.

The language, then, is dictated by the specific reality of the film?

In this case, yes. My first intention was to make it in France, but it couldn't stand on its feet because it's a North American family. And there's another point: the difference between family life and the professional domain—the police—is much greater in North America than in France. In France, there's always the intimate, *soupe au chou* side, while in America it's an enormous machine—those sirens . . . , and when a cop returns home, it's different.

I made the other films in English because I was told it would be better commercially, which I never believed. But in *Blood Relatives* I myself wanted it. I asked to make it in North America. I was a bit afraid it was too much, but it was the ideal thing.

Why did you choose the story of Folies Bourgeoises*?*

I didn't choose it . . .

It's very different from your other films.

Yes. The drama of *Folies Bourgeoises* is very easy to understand. A producer called me to make an adaptation of a novel by Lucie Faure, the wife of the President of the National Assembly in France. That very morning I received a belated payment, an absolutely gigantic sum . . . And these two things together . . . So, I made the film. I made an adaptation for a little film, *comme ça,* and it wasn't all that bad. No, I started by doing something else. I asked the Englishman who wrote *The Ruling Class* to write a kind of frenzied comedy that would bear no similarity whatsoever to the book. The script was great but both the producer and Lucie Faure rejected it, because it had nothing to do with her book. So, I made another, very simple adaptation for a minor film, and the producer said it was fine. From that moment on, he lied: "I've never seen it before!" So, from the first estimate of $700,000 for a small French film we found ourselves with a terribly overblown *soufflé au fromage,* with American, Italian, and German actors. I thought of not shooting it, except for the terrible thing that the contract had been signed and the guy had paid me. Three weeks later, he told me: "Let's make the film!" I said: "Fine." I felt dishonest and thought "*Tant pis!* I'll do it anyway!" It was a kind of mishmash.

The murder scene on the highway in Les Noces Rouges, *was it influenced by the highway scene in Henri Verneuil's* Une Manche et la Belle (What Price Murder), *where Henri Vidal tries to kill Isa Miranda?*

No, I've never seen it. It's much more curious than that. The topic of *Les Noces Rouges,* which is a crime story, is based on a news item. I adapted it scrupulously, making the characters do exactly what they did in life, especially the way the two lovers kill the woman's husband. During the shooting, I realized that it was really

The Postman Always Rings Twice by Tay Garnett, based on the book by James Cain. What is fantastic is that they found Cain's book at the guy's house. That is, he was really inspired by the book. And since James Hadley Chase borrowed it from Cain and Verneuil adapted Chase's novel, that explains it . . .

To conclude, how did you construct the streetcar scene in La Rupture*?*

It's for this scene that I made the film, just about. A woman recounts her life—where can she do it? In a streetcar. This is why we had to shoot the film in Brussels, because there are more streetcars there. I was also lucky. The route I chose was ideal, and it was by chance—it was like in Murnau, passing from the city to the country. I was lucky that in a given moment between shots I looked forward and saw the reflection of the conductor's hand in the window, and I thought: "This is too beautiful! I don't believe it!" This is the sort of thing that you don't rationalize at the time—it is based entirely on sensations. Also, you couldn't disturb the actress —she had changed the text quite a bit, changed the story of her life, but I didn't care because it was good. Stéphane respects the text and the dialogues, but the minute she has a monologue, she changes everything. It's very strange, but it's not serious . . . So, in all my films I put little things like that in order to see what she's going to tell me, because I never know what it will be.

MARSHA KINDER

Carlos Saura: The Political Development of Individual Consciousness

After Luis Buñuel, Carlos Saura is the most brilliant and highly acclaimed film-maker to come out of Spain. Yet few of his twelve features have been seen in the United States—*La Caza (The Hunt)* 1965; *El Jardin de los Delicias (The Garden of Delights)*, 1970; *La Prima Angélica (Cousin Angelica)*, 1973; and *Cría Cuervos (Raise Ravens)*, 1975—and of these, only *Cría Cuervos* has been widely distributed, proving successful in Spain, France, Belgium, Japan, and the US. Nevertheless, Saura's latest films—*Elisa, Vida Mía (Elisa, My Life)*, 1977, and *Los Ojos Vendados (Blindfolded Eyes)*, 1978—have not yet been scheduled for distribution in this country. One would expect better exposure for such a major figure, especially now that Franco is dead and since the New Spanish Cinema has recently been generating enthusiasm at international festivals all over the world, not only for the works of Saura, but also for Manual Gutierrez Aragon's *¡Habla Mudita! (Mute Speech)*, 1973, and *Camada Negra (Black Brood)*, 1977; José Luis Borau's *Furtivos (Poachers)*, 1975; Jaime Chavarri's *El Desencanto (The Disenchanted)*, 1976, and *A Un Dios Desconocido (To an Unknown God)*, 1977; and Victor Erice's *Espiritu de la Colmena (Spirit of the Beehive)*, 1974.

Apparently the American distribution of these films has been held up by US economics rather than Spanish politics. Saura claims: "It is very difficult for small films to get distribution in this country. We have no control over advertising or the choice of theaters. Even when a foreign movie is an economic success in the US, the money rarely reaches Spain. It's a disaster! . . . Nevertheless, I am still interested in having my films distributed in the USA." (I)[1]

Saura was recently in Los Angeles for a

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Ana and her dead father: CRIA CUERVOS

UNESCO five-day symposium on "Cinema and Society," which brought 13 noted international film-makers to the American Film Institute to discuss the social and political impact of cinema on twentieth-century culture.[2] As part of the program, there was a free public screening of one film by each visiting participant followed by a discussion with the film-maker.

Saura was an excellent choice for the conference since he represents a country that has recently undergone a dramatic political change that will undoubtedly be reflected in its cinema. Unlike earlier artists such as Buñuel, Picasso, and Casals, who chose to leave Fascist Spain, Saura (born in 1932) belongs to the generation that grew up under Francoism, and the theme of the Spanish Civil War was obsessive in his work and life. Although one would expect that the lifting of political censorship since the death of Franco in November 1975 would lead to a new surge of political films or a renaissance of the New Spanish Cinema, Saura claims the situation is far more complicated: "It is my personal opinion that the New Spanish Cinema does not exist. What does exist is a number of individuals who make films. I don't know what this label refers to—is it Buñuel?, is it me and Chavarri? Of course, there are several magnificent directors who are working now in Spain, but I think it's wrong to generalize. For me, the individual works come first, then the culture." (I)

Acknowledging that a group of individuals may be influenced in similar ways by social-political events, Saura suggests that sometimes repression can be a stimulus to create: "For me and my compatriots, to make the stories we wanted to do, we had to use indirect methods. For ex-

ample, we couldn't use a linear structure or the ideas would be too clear. It often forced me to exercise my imagination. The same was true in the Golden Age of Spain when artists like Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, and Lope de Vega had to avoid the repression of the Inquisition." (S) Franco's repression stimulated, not only artistic inventiveness, but also moral commitment. "For many years under Francoism, all of us who made movies and painted and wrote were searching for a way to make our medium more effective, not only at the personal level, but also at the level of Spanish society. I believe that when Franco was still alive, I had a moral obligation—maybe more for myself than for society—to do everything that was possible within my form of work to help change the political system as quickly as possible. That was in no way an imposition on me as an individual, for I was living in a repressive society that did not allow me to express many of the things I wanted to express." (I)

Although he now expects to have greater freedom of expression, Saura wants to use it to develop a more personal rather than a political cinema. In a recent interview, he observed: "When I began making films in the late fifties, I sometimes felt myself a spokesman for ideas which were only partially my own. Now, after eleven films, I feel I speak for myself."

Saura is proud to be called an *auteur.* "Making movies is part of my life—it's not merely a profession or work. I write my own scripts and have never adapted a novel or play. I consider myself an *auteur.*" (I) It does not disturb him that his personal films might not reach a mass audience. "I think it's dangerous to set out to make a film for the masses. It seems to me more interesting to do what you want to do. I think the most wonderful thing is to have receptive people in the audience interpret what you have done. At the moment, it may only be one person, but later it might be 50,000, and some day millions. When a film has a large audience, there is a better chance of reaching more receptive individuals and that's always very satisfying. But I think the most important thing is to do what you must do and that's the only way it's possible to find this kind of communication." (I)

To do a thorough job of interpreting his works, one would really have to see all of his films. Yet some strong patterns emerge even in the few films that have reached this country.

Many of Saura's films focus on childhood. In his first feature *Los Golfos (The Urchins),* 1959, the first Spanish film to be shot entirely on location, he used a neorealistic style to document a group of impoverished young delinquents who are trying to get the money for one of them to become a bullfighter, which they see as the only way for them to achieve success in their society; the release of the film was held up until 1962. Perhaps as with their later choice of a nonlinear structure, Saura and some of his compatriots began focusing on youth as a means of getting political commentary past the censors, who have persistently plagued them. For example, from Saura's second film *Llanto por un Bandido (Lament for a Bandit),* 1963, which portrayed the life of an Andalusian outlaw, government censors cut many scenes, including one in which Buñuel plays a hangman. In *The Hunt,* which deals with a hunting trip taken by three friends who earlier had fought on the winning side of the Civil War, Saura was prevented from mentioning any political events. When *The Garden of Delights* was first shown in Spain, five out of ten reels were re-edited and the release was delayed. The subtle critical commentary on the Falange in *Cousin Angelica* evoked a bombing incident in Barcelona, thefts of prints, threats against projectionists, and vandalism against theaters—the same kind of behavior that was portrayed in Gutierrez's *Black Brood,* which was banned in Spain and refused official permission for foreign distribution. Even in this open attack against Francoism, Gutierrez focuses on a young individual as he develops from a sensitive young boy into a brutal killer within the bosom of his fanatic Falangist family. Gutierrez's portrait of the making of a Fascist belongs with Malle's *Lacombe, Lucien,* Bertolucci's *The Conformist,* and Visconti's *The Damned.*

In contrast to these operatic films with their dramatic sweep of violent deeds and historical events, Saura's later works are more interior and subtle. They focus more narrowly on an individual within the close confines of a bourgeois family and stress the mental life of a particular con-

sciousness—memories, dreams and fantasies—rather than external events. After making *Elisa, Vida Mia,* Saura observed in an interview: "My belief is that those who pretend that art can solve social problems make the mistake of forgetting that normally the artist is a victim of society. I find it absurd when I see those who claim a political aim in the arts rebuking artists for not fulfilling their duties as good citizens. Of course, the first thing should be to agree on what is a truly political attitude; for me a labor dispute is no more political than the difficulties two people face to go on living together."

Saura's primary focus is the crippling influence of social and political forces on individuals, particularly during childhood, which is revealed through a return to the past or a reunion with family. Like Chevarri's *To an Unknown God* (the most perceptive portrait of a male homosexual I have seen on film) and Erice's *Spirit of the Beehive* (also featuring a brilliant performance by the young Ana Torrent, who stars in *Cría Cuervos*), Saura's films achieve extraordinary subtlety in their psychological realism. He makes unusual demands on his actors, whose facial expressions and physical gestures must simultaneously convey both the masks required by the society and the underlying passions and ambivalences. Saura's films are masterpieces of repression in which the subtext is developed, not with the surreal wit or grotesquery of a Buñuel, but with the emotional intensity and psychological astuteness of a Bergman. As in Bergman's canon, Saura's films are woven together by recurring names, faces, characters, and situations that suggest a tapestry of recurring dreams.

Within his repressive society, Saura valiantly tried to approximate the artistic freedom of an *auteur* like Bergman, but it took him time to develop such an approach. "My first film *The Urchins* was very much like a documentary. It was a very interesting experience, but I was much more interested in making fictional movies that required more invention. *Lament for a Bandit* was all laid out beforehand like a typical Spanish film. The final product was not what I wanted; I considered it a personal failure. After this film, I made an absolute decision to work another way—to work slowly, to work only on projects that excited me, and not to make any concessions." (I)

He realized that his problems with *Lament for a Bandit* were partly caused by the large budget. "We were trying to approximate the American way of making a film. From that point I decided to make films only that I could control completely, with fewer characters and thus less expensive. Gradually, a crew was formed and always with the same producer. The same was true of the actors; it's easier to work with actors you know because you start out with a basic knowledge of what you have already done, and then take off from there. From *The Hunt* on, I have worked in this way." (S)

Since 1965, Saura's producer has been Elías Querejeta, who has given him total artistic freedom. "Querejeta is a very intelligent and dynamic man. He has never behaved like a producer. He always asks me—what do you want to do? Can it be done economically or not? Then he never says anything more until the movie is finished. During the years under Franco, there were many difficult times because of censorship. Several movies were banned—a few of mine, a few by others. Everybody was affected, and Elías was always very supportive despite the fact that sometimes he was close to bankruptcy. Gradually, the movies we made have been accepted and therefore he has recovered financially. This has enabled Elías to produce more movies with other young directors. At this moment, I think he is one of the most interesting independent producers in the world—not just because he is my friend, but because he really is!" (I)

Despite the fact that all of his films since *Peppermint Frappé* (1967) have complex nonlinear structures, Saura has chosen the unconventional technique of shooting every film in the sequence it appears on the screen. "This decision to work chronologically is related to my previous decision because in order to do what I really want to, I need two things—total freedom of movement and the possibility of modifying things in relation to what's previously been done." (I) His films are never tightly scripted ("The script is only the basis from which I start creating") so there is always ample room for improvisation. "Everyone knows that a film starts with the

first image and ends with the last one. But for a film director, or at least for me, a movie starts when I begin working on it and ends when I quit. During this long process, there are ideas that I have at home that change substantially once I try to shoot them. It's more exciting doing it this way—for the director, the actors, and the crew—because the film is truly born through the collaboration and this evolution is parallel for the actors, the crew, and myself. It is very exciting to watch the transformation in the psychology of the actors, the lighting, the montage, and in all of the elements that go into the shooting of the movie." (I)

This method of shooting in sequence is related to Saura's thematic focus on the development of an individual consciousness, in which a particular set of events result in his protagonist's unique bent of mind, which is a reflection of his own. "Every film is a unique experience. It's not transferable in time and space. I can't separate it from my own life because what I'm doing is what I want to do." (S) Saura uses this same sequential method in developing his canon; it is impossible to imagine him working on several projects simultaneously like an Altman or a Godard. "Every film is a consequence of the film before it. Only when a film is completed, do I feel the necessity of starting the next one." (S)

THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

Of all Saura's works, *The Garden of Delights* is the closest to Buñuel in its use of surreal symbolism; it depicts the discreet horrors of the bourgeoisie living under Franco repression. In tracing the mutual destructiveness of a powerful industrialist and his family of decadent pleasure-seekers, the film also evokes the grotesqueries of the Bosch painting (one of the prize treasures of the Prado) from which it derives its title. Interestingly, Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes (who is a close friend of Saura's) also absorbs this painting to portray an imagination perverted by the Spanish Inquisition in his masterful *Terra Nostra,* the foreword of which acknowledges both Saura and Buñuel. Saura claims it is not a matter of influence among Fuentes, Buñuel, and himself or the fact that they are friends, but rather that they are all products of the same Hispanic culture. Their shared concern with the dialectic between daydream and material reality, myth and history, fantasy and satire, comes not from Freud and Marx or Anglo-Saxon tradition, but from Cervantes, Calderón, and Catholicism; and it can also be found in other contemporary Latin American writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and Manuel Puig. "There is a very strong imaginative force in our Hispanic culture, which is absolutely original. It has nothing to do with the Anglo-Saxon culture or any other. Unfortunately the dominant culture in the world today is the Anglo-Saxon—economically and culturally, their pressure is very strong. But I think for a number of years the Latin American countries have been conscious of the originality of their culture. That's why, for example, Gabriel García Márquez is so wonderful. He realizes that this imaginative potential can be a way of seeing life differently from the way it is perceived by the pragmatic Anglo-Saxon culture." (I)

One of the assumptions that these artists share in common and that is powerfully demonstrated in Saura's *Garden of Delights* is that by fully probing the fantasies of individuals, it is possible to perceive an entire culture and to demystify political dynamics. Antonio Cano, the rich protagonist in *The Garden of Delights* (brilliantly played by José Luis López Vázquez) is crippled in an auto accident, which confines him to a wheel chair and forces him to return to the role of a helpless child. Suffering massive brain damage, he is partially paralyzed, his speech is seriously impaired, and his memory half gone. By choosing such a character to control the film's point of view, Saura makes the gap between inner life and outward behavior essential to the plot and dramatizes quite literally the crippling influence of Spanish society on an individual consciousness. The film suggests that this destructive influence has been operating, not just in the accident, but all of Antonio's life. The accident merely confirms what was already true—his emotional, mental, and spiritual deterioration.

The film opens with a brilliant, theatrical sequence in which a striking woman costumes herself to resemble a lady in an old photograph. She is directed by the man who also appears in this picture. Now grown old, he uses make-up to

impersonate his younger self. Then a huge squealing pig is carried into an elegant bedroom, where the stage is set for the entrance of the crippled Antonio, who is to be both the star performer and audience in this family melodrama. Later, we discover that this bizarre scene has been staged by Antonio's father as a means of restoring his son's memory so that he can tell them the number of a Swiss bank account that contains most of the family fortune. He has chosen this particular scene because it re-enacts a terrifying trauma in which the five-year-old Antonio was punished by being locked in a room and told that an animal would devour his hands. Before we understand the context, this sequence evokes Buñuel's surreal trickery of putting animals in elegant settings (e.g., the dead donkey in *Un Chien Andalou,* the oxen in *L'Age d'Or,* the bear and sheep in *Exterminating Angel,* and the ostrich and cock in *The Phantom of Liberty*). Yet, when we understand what is happening, it arouses the kind of emotional intensity that Bergman achieves in *Hour of the Wolf* with the nightmarish account of a similar childhood punishment also involving castration anxiety and guilt—a boy is locked in a closet, which he is told contains an evil little man who will bite off his toes.

Saura is masterful in controlling the modulation of tone between the bitter satire, which is sometimes comic or absurd, and the psychological reality of the emotional pain. For example, in the sequence where Antonio's neglected wife tries to re-enact their first love scene in a boat on an idyllic lake, the replay almost turns into a parody of *An American Tragedy*; yet, the yearnings of this woman are still poignant, and the economic basis of the rejection is still underscored.

The film implies that all members of the family and of the society have suffered the same psychic damage as Antonio. This symbolic point is rendered concretely in the final powerful fantasy where each member of the family is isolated in a wheel chair, rolling across an elegent lawn like crippled performers in a perverted minuet.

COUSIN ANGELICA

In *Cousin Angelica* there is a shift from blatant symbolism to a more subtle personal expression; the crippling of consciousness is neither so literal

In COUSIN ANGELICA, *Luis (José Luis Lopéz Vazquez) relives his childhood—but his image remains adult.*

nor so melodramatic, and the boundaries between inner life and outer events are more obscure. The story follows the outer and inner journey of Luis Cano (again played by Vázquez), a quiet, lonely, middle-aged bachelor, who comes to bury the bones of his mother, who has been dead for 20 years. He visits his aunt Pilar, whom he lived with 30 years ago during the Civil War, and his cousin Angelica, whom he loved as a child, and relives moments from his childhood, which was shaped by the war that bitterly split his family in two and separated him from his parents.

Cousin Angelica is Saura's first autobiographical film. "In my other films, there are autobiographical parts, but this is the first film I've made in which I've tried to reflect my own life. During my childhood the Civil War had a tremendous impact on me, which is reflected in my movie." (S) When asked why he chose to portray a Francoist family rather than the other side, he

replied: "Because that was my experience—my mother's family was pro-Franco." (S) Luis is called "the black sheep of the family" and apparently sympathizes with his father's anti-Franco views; hence, this is actually Saura's first film to focus on those who lost the war. The film is dedicated to his in-laws Oona and Charlie Chaplin, whose political loyalties are well known, and whom he chose as a new family allegiance. María Clara Fernández de Loayza, the actress he selected to play the young Angelica (like Ana Torrent who stars in *Cría Cuervos*), will probably grow up to resemble his wife Geraldine Chaplin. Saura does not feel compelled to represent the events of his life as they actually occurred. "I don't like autobiographies that are like diaries. What interests me is the imagination working on one's own life—naturally, this offers a wide leeway for creation." (I) This is precisely the focus of the film—Luis's imaginative recreation of childhood memories.

Like other artists who dramatize the development of consciousness (Bergman, James, Proust), Saura bases his creation on germinal sensory images. This process is explicitly described in one scene where Luis remarks, "One day Proust dipped a madeleine in his tea and his mouth was full of the smell of his grandmother's garden." This associative process of drawing a story out of rich, concrete images controls both Saura's creative method and the film's narrative structure. "The mechanisms of memory are different in every person. One day I looked in the mirror and said, 'My goodness, what did I look like as a child?' I can't remember myself as a child in the mirror. I have photographs, but when I look at them, I feel it's someone I don't know. When I've tried to reconstruct my past, I don't do so with the mentality of a child. Mostly I see myself as I am now, but going back 20 or 30 years. That was one of the fundamental ideas that made me make this film—that you cannot see yourself as a child." (S)

The film is controlled by this idea, for the adult Luis appears in all of his childhood memories; we never see him as a child. This puts extraordinary demands on Vázquez, who is able to express the childhood perspective through subtle changes in his facial expressions and body postures and by enlarging his eyes. After a while, we actually see the child *in Luis,* regardless of his external setting. We gradually understand that although Luis has come to bury his past, it is much more alive for him than the present and that his inner life is much more engaging than external events. This helps us to understand why he rejects Angelica as a woman and is much more attracted to her nine-year-old daughter. While he claims that being single means he is "free but alone," we see that he is actually bound to the ghosts from his past.

Yet like Saura, Luis is free to alter his memories, sometimes casting them with characters from his immediate environment. For example, Angelica's affable, unfaithful husband Anselmo is cast in the role of her tyrannical Francoist father, who came between the young lovers. Luis insists they look alike, even when Angelica shows him old photographs of her father to prove the contrary. Sometimes Luis's distortions are humorous—as when he pictures Angelica's father with his arm in a cast; although his uncle claims to have been wounded by shrapnel, it looks more like his arm was paralyzed in a fascist salute. Saura suggests that not only is our present determined by our past, but our past is reshaped by the present. The mediator is the individual consciousness.

The film opens with a powerful germinal image. As we hear choir boys singing, we see white mist drifting through a church schoolroom, which is illuminated by strange overexposed lighting; the camera slowly glides through wreckage, observing signs of violence from some unknown disaster. We do not yet know what happened, nor do we recognize the mode of reality—present event, nightmare, or memory. Yet the image immediately engages our attention and opens the door to Luis's consciousness. "The mechanics of the mind are very complicated. What we call reality may be everyday life, dreams, memories, obsessions. That's the material I like to work with. I try to find a luminous window or open door to this kind of reality." (S)

Later in the film, when we return to this image, we realize it was a childhood memory of a traumatic incident in which Luis's school was bombed. In order to understand its full impact, we must

learn what other memories it is associated with in Luis's mind. For example, he links it with the death of an 11-year-old boy, who was killed by a bomb while playing in a school courtyard, for his priest uses this as a moral exemplum to instill the fear of sin and death in the minds of Luis and his classmates. The association between religion, death, and guilt is also strong in the memory of a theatrical performance of Christ's crucifixion, where Luis, who plays a Roman guard, is tempted to flirt with Angelica. In another memory, a priest berates him when he refuses to confess any improper sexual contact with his cousin. When Luis and his family visit a nun with bandaged hands, who offers her self-inflicted wounds to compensate for wartime suffering, he confuses her with the "stigmatized nun," who is the subject of a painting that hangs in his bedroom, which triggers a terrifying childhood nightmare. As soon as the bandaged sister criticizes his father's politics, which is intended to arouse Luis's guilt, he sees a cancerous worm crawling out of her breast as in the painting and his nightmare. All of these memories reveal that, like the War, the Catholic Church effectively cripples the young with guilt and fear, inhibiting their enjoyment of sensual pleasures and stifling any rebellious political consciousness.

The other primary source of imprinting in Luis's childhood is art. While in many of his memories it is controlled by the Church (e.g., the religious pageant is evoked by music, the nightmare by the religious painting), the secular art is also powerful: Luis still hears Aunt Pilar's piano long after she has given up playing, and the adult Angelica still can recite the love poem that the young Luis stole from Antonio Machado. One of Luis's most vivid memories is of a wartime documentary called *The Eyes of London,* which showed "blue eyes everywhere!" When we actually see the film played back in his mind, we discover it is in black and white. The eyes are covered with dehumanized goggles and belong to uniformed men who move like mannequins through wartime rubble. The human eyes are visible only in the final shot, when one of the ominous figures removes his goggles. These images are based on Saura's own memories, which, like Luis's, are drastically altered. "*The Eyes of London* is a movie I saw in school when I was a child. I was very impressed by it, but I have transformed the images in *Cousin Angelica* and have created an entirely different film from that memory." (I)

The opening sequence of the bombing is followed by a scene in which Luis receives his mother's bones, which he locks in the trunk of

COUSIN ANGELICA

his car. Now we recognize the present encounter with death that triggers the terrifying memory. As we watch Luis driving along a desolate road that leads to the city where he spent his youth, we also follow his train of thought. When he stops on the road, he sees an old car from the thirties containing his parents, who approach him to say farewell. These voices from the past speak the first dialogue of the film. Though we hear Luis answer, at first his lips don't move; but as he becomes more absorbed in reliving this moment, he says aloud to his mother, with full conviction and feeling, "I want to be with you." Like the bombing incident, this memory recurs later in the film. After remembering a childhood fantasy in which he had imagined his father's execution, Luis returns to this roadside memory. But in this version, he is split in two: as he drives in the car, he sees himself talking with his parents on the road, which literally turns him around. Like a Prufrock, the "you and I" of Luis are embarked on a strange mental journey, with "a hundred visions and revisions" that keep him from fully engaging in the present. The first roadside fantasy is interrupted by the germinal image that is central to Saura's creation of the film—the aging Luis staring into a mirror as he shaves, unable to see himself as a child.

At the end of his visit, after he has rejected his cousin's sexual advances and decided to return to Barcelona, Luis borrows her daughter's bicycle and takes one last short trip into the past. It is the traumatic incident in which the war forever separated him from his cousin Angelica. The young lovers flee on a bicycle to Madrid, where they plan to be reunited with his parents. But they are stopped on the road by Francoist soldiers, who return them to her angry father. As he beats the cringing Luis with his leather belt, the uncle becomes the living embodiment of Fascist tyranny; no wonder his image is so easily blurred in Luis's mind with that of Angelica's husband. While Luis is being punished, Angelica sits in the next room, tearfully listening to his sobs as her mother tries to soothe her by brushing her hair; on the sound track, Imperio Argentina sings *Ricío.* Like Romeo and Juliet, these war-crossed lovers are destroyed—not physically, but psychically: she will be trapped in a boring conventional marriage, and he will be doomed to solitude. This separation repeats what already happened in the previous generation between Luis's father and his aunt Pilar. When the lonely old lady bids farewell to her nephew, she says, "Tell your father that . . . no, nothing." For the same reasons, Luis really has nothing to say to his cousin Angelica.

Cousin Angelica

CRÍA CUERVOS (RAISE RAVENS)

"The last image in *Cousin Angelica*—the mother combing the daughter's hair—is the opening of *Cría Cuervos.*" (S) The first Saura film to be based on a script he wrote entirely alone, *Cría Cuervos*—its creation, its narrative structure, and its center of consciousness—grow out of this opening germinal image: the hair of the nine-year-old Ana (brilliantly played by Ana Torrent) is lovingly groomed by her mother (Geraldine Chaplin). We do not yet realize that Ana's mother is dead and that this ordinary domestic ritual is actually an obsessive fantasy of the child, whose emotional life has been shaped by the loss of her mother. When we discover that Geraldine Chaplin also plays the adult Ana, who in 1995 is looking back on her childhood (set in Madrid in 1975), we realize that the image may reflect the reworked memory of the woman rather than the girl. We wonder whether she has substituted her own image for that of her mother (just as she has been forced to replace her with her own fantasy creations), or whether she has modelled herself after her mother's image, which Ana now embodies. In either case, it is the child's consciousness that dominates both the central char-

acter and the film. Reversing the central premise of *Cousin Angelica, Cría Cuervos* raises the question of what happens when you *can* see yourself as a child. An old Spanish proverb warns, "Raise ravens and they'll peck out your eyes."

This film presents the best portrayal of a child I have ever seen. Saura has observed: "I have never believed in the child's paradise. On the contrary, I think that childhood is a stage where nocturnal terror, fear of the unknown, loneliness, are present with at least the same intensity as the joy of living and that curiosity of which pedagogues talk so much."[3] The intensity of Ana's passions is made so credible that, without any melodrama, we can accept a nine-year-old contemplating suicide and poisoning one of her family elders. Her interior fantasy life is so vivid that when she awakens from a nightmare and discovers her mother's phantom has fled, without any sentimentality, we can identify with her panic and terror and her desperate longing for her mother. The child's perception of adult realities (e.g., her father's sexual adventures, which lead to his fatal heart attack, and his mistreatment of her mother, which is partly responsible for her death) is so convincing because, without fully comprehending all of the events, she intuits the emotional reality. Through her eyes, we are able to see the adults with a double perspective that may also partially reflect the adult Ana's consciousness. For example, although we sympathize with Aunt Paulina in her frustrating romance with a married man and admire her conscientious efforts to raise Ana and her two sisters, we still understand why the young Ana hates her. Aunt Paulina is not loving like Ana's mother, especially when she imposes tyrannical rules on the children. Like Luis's Aunt Pilar in *Cousin Angelica,* despite her kindness and genuine warmth, she can never fully replace the absent mother, whose memory is forever locked in the heart of her child. As Ana's ancient grandmother sits in her wheelchair—paralyzed, mute, and expressionless—staring at yellowed photographs and listening to old phonograph records, we realize that her mind is totally absorbed in the past and that for her the present is dead. The young Ana feels great pity for this old woman, whom she would like to put out of her misery; as an adult, Ana will identify with this total immersion in memories. The grandmother evokes a remembrance of things past—not only of a Spain before Franco, but also of Antonio in Saura's own *Garden of Delights.*

CRIA CUERVOS: *(top) the exterior "normal" life of Ana; and (bottom) the fantasy life.*

Despite this intense inner life, on the surface Ana appears to be a "normal" nine-year-old, particularly when she and her older sister dance to pop records and dress up like women. In these scenes, Saura carefully avoids cuteness and sentimentality; he uses these potential clichés to enlarge the range of Ana's fantasy life. In the final scene, we watch the two girls running to school, performing another ordinary domestic ritual as in the opening image. Yet, again, the fantasy

world dominates. The sister describes to Ana a powerful dream she had the night before, which suggests that, if she had been the central consciousness of the film, the emotional content might have been equally as intense. Saura says that the actress who played the sister actually had this dream the night before they shot the scene. His decision to include it in the film broadens the scope of this personal work by suggesting that if one probed deeply enough, one would perhaps discover such sensitivity and pain in everyone—even in the most complacent, privileged bourgeoisie. Though the repressive Francoist society is still portrayed as shaping the individual consciousness of the protagonist—particularly through the self-centered domination of a militaristic father and the oppressive atmosphere of a rich, conservative family controlled by restrictive social and religious conventions—the social forces are further in the background than in previous Saura films. Although *Cría Cuervos* was shot while Franco was still alive, it already reveals Saura's movement toward a more personal cinema.

The Future

Since we have not yet seen any of Saura's films made after the death of Franco, it is difficult to determine whether his cinema will actually become more personal or more political. *Elisa, Vida Mia* tells the story of Luis (Fernando Rey), a 60-year-old writer living in seclusion, who is visited by his daughter Elisa (Geraldine Chaplin) whom he hasn't seen for 20 years. He incorporates their conversations into his writings until the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred. Saura describes the film as the story of two human beings finding each other again, "but also of many other things like, for instance, the father's gradual domination of his daughter as they interchange experiences and secrets. It could also be the story of a marriage which ends and another which starts, or a film about solitude, failure, death. Or even a reflection on the differences between literature and cinema."

Blindfolded Eyes is a love story about an acting teacher named Luis (José Luis Gómez) and an actress named Emilia (Geraldine Chaplin), whom he is directing in a role based on an actual woman he has heard giving testimony on how she was tortured. The film is based on an experience Saura had in May 1977 when he was participating in a symposium in Madrid on repression and torture in Latin America. "Above all, I was impressed by the declarations of a woman who started telling us with a total lack of emotion, . . . and in an unmistakeable Argentine accent, the way she had been tortured . . . Those of us who were part of the presiding table, the testifying lawyers and the woman expounding her terrifying experiences with torture, were on the stage of a theater, each one of us performing the role that had been assigned to us in a play called *The Blindfolded Eyes* . . . In my double role as both actor and spectator, I observed the young audience that listened with great attention to the actress-witness. Suddenly, a couple of young boys armed with machine guns rose from the floor and started shooting at us. And why not? The brutal killing of five labor lawyers in Atocha street in Madrid had only recently happened, and it was at that time that a series of organized groups were trying to create an atmosphere of terror in the city."[4]

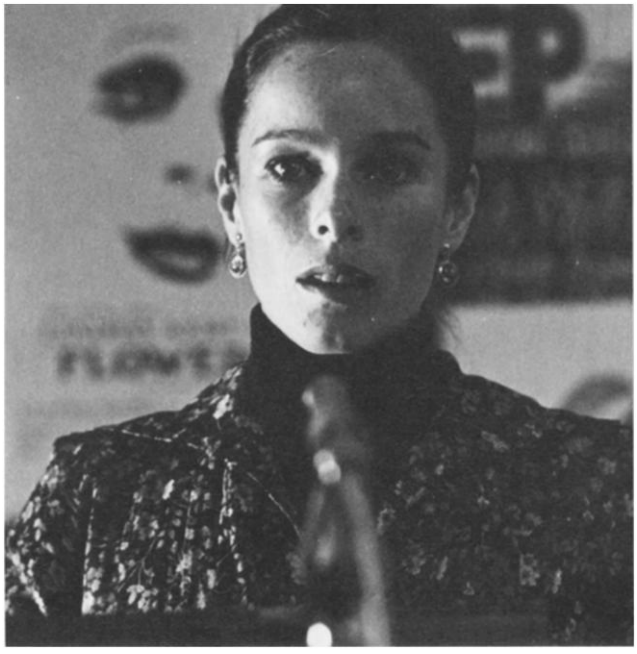
Although highly self-reflexive like *Elisa, Vida Mia, Blindfolded Eyes* is more direct in expressing Saura's anger over political events. "Perhaps in *Blindfolded Eyes* this anger that I feel is made more clear than in any other of my movies due to the subject I have chosen for the film. But beyond the reality of torture, unfortunately proved in most of those countries that call themselves civilized, what I would have liked to make clear in *Blindfolded Eyes* is the fact that, almost without realizing it, we live in a world dominated by a violence which is at times visible and at times hidden, and which is restricting our freedom."

◀ Elisa, Vida Mia

CARLOS SAURA

Currently Saura is working on a project that will be a continuation of *Ana and the Wolves,* 1972. Although it was made between *The Garden of Delights* and *Cousin Angelica,* this film has never been released in the US. "Of course, if you haven't seen *Ana and the Wolves,* it's difficult to talk about my new project. The earlier film is about a rich Spanish family that lives in a large house on the outskirts of a city. Geraldine Chaplin plays a British girl who comes to the house. The movie deals with the relationship between this girl and the family, which contain all the Spanish prototypes—a mystic, a military man, etc. It's rather metaphorical, like a political allegory. The whole situation is controlled by a mother figure. My new film is *Mama Cumple Cien Anos (Mother Reaches 100).* It takes place 15 years later when the British girl returns to the house and finds the children are now men and women and that everyone in the family has been transformed by the cultural and political changes." (I)

Although like *Blindfolded Eyes* this film promises to deal more centrally with political issues than *Cría Cuervos* and *Elisa, Vida Mia,* they will once again be filtered through the consciousness of an individual. Saura insists, "I have always been interested more in the individual than in society." (I)



Geraldine Chaplin in BLINDFOLDED EYES

NOTES

1. Most of the quotations from Saura are based on two sources: his remarks following the UNESCO screening of *Cousin Angelica,* August 19, 1978, translated into English by Geraldine Chaplin; and an interview I conducted with him on August 20th, in which Nicolas Bautista did the translating. These sources are indicated in the text by S and I respectively.
2. Other participants were: Lindsay Anderson (England), Alfonso Arau (Mexico), Michael Cacoyannis (Greece), Youssef Chahine (Egypt), André Delvaux (Belgium), Susumu Hani (Japan), Claude Jutra (Canada), Janusz Majewski (Poland), Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), Mrinal Sen (India), Agnes Varda (France), and Nelson Pereira dos Santos (Brazil). US film-making was represented by Robert Aldrich, Jan Kadar (although Czechoslavakian, he was the 1975 AFI Film-maker in Residence), Rouben Mamoulian, Alan Pakula, and King Vidor.
3. From an interview between Carlos Saura and Angel S. Harguindey for the book *Cría Cuervos,* edited by Elías Querejeta.
4. This and the following quote are extracts from another interview between Carlos Saura and Angel S. Harguindey.

FILMOGRAPHY

Works made while a student at the Film School in Madrid (which Saura entered in 1953):

1955 *Antonio Saura*
1957 *La Tarde de Domingo (Sunday Afternoon)*
1958 *Cuenca*

Features:

1959 *Los Golfos (The Urchins)*
1963 *Llanto por un Bandido (Lament for a Bandit)*
1965 *La Caza (The Hunt)*
1967 *Peppermint Frappé*
1968 *Stress es Tres, Tres (Stress is Three, Three)*
1969 *La Madriguera (The Honeycomb)*
1970 *El Jardin de los Delicias (The Garden of Delights)*
1972 *Ana y los Lobos (Ana and the Wolves)*
1973 *La Prima Angélica (Cousin Angelica)*
1975 *Cría Cuervos (Raise Ravens)*
1977 *Elisa, Vida Mía (Elisa, My Life)*
1978 *Los Ojos Vendados (Blindfolded Eyes)*

Work in Progress:

Mama Cumple Cien Años (Mama Reaches 100)

JESÚS SALVADOR TREVIÑO

The New Mexican Cinema

On April 22, 1974, Mexican President Luis Echeverría Alvarez assembled the entire force of Mexican film-making—producers, directors, actors and technicians—on the spacious grounds of the Los Pinos Presidential estate in Mexico City and delivered a landmark address. "I formally invite all workers, now," he said, "to unite with the State, to produce [films on] the great human themes of the Mexican Revolution; to undertake social criticism, to initiate self-criticism. Each of you," he continued, "must feel this with moral authority, aesthetic capability and imaginative force, so that, together, all of us can better Mexico."

The Echeverría speech underscored many previous overtures calling for a new kind of film-making, including a major address to film-makers delivered in Santiago, Chile, in 1972 in which he declared that, "A cinema that lies is a cinema that brutalizes its public." Echeverría's invitation at Los Pinos marked a unique experiment in Mexican politics and filmic history. It was an expression of a presidential decision to lay the groundwork for a new kind of cinema—one that would respond and speak to the social concerns of Mexico. It was, at the same time, an effort by the Mexican government to finish nationalization of its film industry and to furnish its film-makers with the necessary wherewithal to elevate the quality of their art—increased capital, political support, and artistic freedom.

To what degree was the Echeverría experiment successful? How did the film-makers respond, the *auteur* directors who were to be the hope of the new era in cinema? What were these "great human themes of the Mexican Revolution" that the new wave of Mexican directors sought to explore? Would Rodolfo Echeverría, the president's brother and director of the powerful nationalized Banco Nacional Cinematográfico, be successful in raising the quality of Mexican cinema, and would the changes brought about by these films of "social criticism" be lasting? The answers to these questions can be partially appreciated by a review of some of the major films made during the Echeverría years of 1970 through 1977, films which today mark a new presence in Mexican cinema, and which continue to provoke many difficult and penetrating questions.

In Mexico there is a special kind of pastry which is called a *churro.* It is made simply by fast-frying bread dough in oil and then sprinkling on a bit of sugar. The bread which results has little nutritional value, is cheaply produced, but is popular and sells quite well.

To understand the Mexican filmic experience prior to Luis Echeverría, one must understand that the majority of films produced between 1960 and 1970 were commonly referred to, with no little disdain, as *churros.* These were films geared to the lowest common denominator of popular taste and lacked the ambition of serious film-making that had marked the films of Mexico's "golden era" in the forties. The *churros* were cheaply made, mostly by *productores privados:* private, profit-minded independent producers with few or no artistic pretensions. Recalls veteran director of photography Rosalío Solano, "often we would film three or four films in as many weeks, we'd forget which film we were filming!"

Actors and sets were interchangeable in these counterparts to American "B" movies—at times actors and sets would be used simultaneously for two different films. The stark realities of economic underdevelopment permitted little refinement in Mexican film-making. "The effect of these films on the Mexican public," remembers director Paul Leduc, "was summarized by a popular expression of the day, 'Cine Mexicano? Yo no veo cine Mexicano!" (Mexican films? I never go to see Mexican films!)

Only occasionally would there surface out-of-the ordinary films such as *Macario* (1960), *Ani-*

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mas Trujanas (1961), *El Angel Exterminador* (1962), *La Formula Secreta* (1965) or *En Este Pueblo No Hay Ladrones* (1965).

It was not until the 1965 Experimental Film Festival sponsored by the film industry's umbrella union, the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica (STPC), that new film-makers and a distinct cinema began to emerge publicly. It is significant that the STPC (Union of Film Industry Workers) should feel the need to promote new film-makers, to inject new blood into the tradition-bound and closed writer and director guilds. "It was an effort on the part of the technicians' union to rejuvenate their ranks with new talent, people who would bring new ideas to Mexican cinema," reflects new wave director Gonzalo Martínez, "and it was a rejuvenating effort that soon bore fruit." Clearly, the talent, themes, and potential evident in such films as *La Formula Secreta* by Rubén Gámaz and *En Este Pueblo No Hay Ladrones* by Alberto Isaac, both high point winners in the contest, signalled that a new cinema was indeed in the offing.

While the STPC experimental film festival brought to notice some of the new directors who would later be incorporated into the new Mexican cinema, it was not just the film festivals which began to provoke new directions in Mexican cinema. As early as 1961, the creation of special film classes at the University of Mexico inspired the creative vision of many who would later become the *auteurs* of the Echeverría *sexenio* (six-year presidential term). In 1963, with the creation of an autonomous film department at the University, the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC), a new avenue for development of directors was institutionalized. Among the soon to be important directors who trained at the CUEC during 1964, 1965, and 1966 were: Alberto Bojorquez, Jorge Fons, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Alfredo Joskowicz, and Marcella Fernandez Volante. Also during the mid-sixties, other Mexican directors were getting their basic training abroad: Paul Leduc and screenwriter Tomás Perez Turrent were studying in Paris; Gonzalo Martínez and Sergio Olhovich were training in Moscow; and Juan Manuel Torres was in Poland.

By 1969, the film-makers abroad had returned home, the CUEC had graduated several classes of film-makers, and the experimental film competitions had proven the viability of and need for a new cinema. This—coupled with the still fiery political consciousness awakened by the Tlatelolco massacre on 1968, and its attendant student movement—made the emergence of a new Mexican cinema, if not inevitable, at least highly predictable.

The key factors in the shift to the new film-making were economic and political—the change-over brought by Luis Echeverría's *apertura democrática* (liberalization) of the film industry was a function of Echeverría's particular brand of Mexican politics and of the deplorable economics of Mexican film-making he inherited when he became President.

When Luis Echeverría Alvarez took office in 1970, he had followed a pattern familiar in Mexican politics since the time of Plutarco Calles in the twenties. Echeverría was a member of the cabinet of the previous president, Díaz Ordaz; he was hand-picked by Ordaz to succeed him, and he was the only candidate of the major (and for practical purposes, only) political party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Once in office, Echeverría set out to establish himself as a progressive president and self-appointed spokesperson for the Third World. Within a short time, his outspoken liberal declarations and policies aroused great controversy. Soon many hopeful Mexicans were comparing him favorably with Cardenas, the Mexican President of the forties who had nationalized the oil industry, booting out the "yanqui" companies, and had done much to bring about agrarian reform. Others, particularly conservatives, private industry, and foreign investors, were openly alarmed. The perenially divided Left was suspicious and skeptical of overtures by a president who had been attorney general at the time of the Tlatelolco massacre. Still, Echeverría's self-espoused liberalism, which would later result in his unsuccessful bid for Secretary General of the United Nations, was well on its way.

It is not surprising that Echeverría would carry his program of liberalization into the arena of film-making. Here was an opportunity to en-

lighten and stimulate the Mexican public through the entertainment industry. Less idealistically and perhaps more economically motivated, here too was an opportunity to open up new markets for a cinema that too often ran in the red. With his brother Rodolfo head of the Banco, Luis Echeverría added the Studio de Las Américas to the roster of state-owned studios and by the time of his Los Pinos speech, Echeverría had built up three state-operated production houses: Conacine in 1973, and later Conacite I and Conacite II. These were already on their way to producing films which suited Echeverría's image as a progressive leader of the Third World, an image that required him to liberalize the strict censorship codes and to promote "films of social criticism."

"This liberalization," recalls director Sergio Olhovich, president of the new wave movement, "was in response to two factors. The first was economic. Mexican cinema was failing because it had lost the market it once had; and this was because of the terrible quality of our films—the producers up to then only thought of cinema as a commercial enterprise. This prompted Rodolfo Echeverría to take economic steps which resulted in state control of film production. And this is the key point: the old-style private producers began to retire from film-making when it became evident that they could not make the fortunes they had once made. Film-making through the state was no longer commercially profitable the way it had been for independents. But now the quality of film-making began to improve. The other factor was the liberalization of theme and content, which was also necessary to open up new markets for our cinema."

Whether motivated by economic considerations, political ambitions, in response to the creative vision of new film-makers, or a combination of these factors, once Rodolfo Echeverría took office in 1970, he began to aggressively open up channels for improved film-making. "He gave a new direction on all cinematographic fronts," remembers Jorge Fons, a quiet-spoken and bearded new wave director who made more than five features during the Echeverría years. "He opened up the traditionally strict censorship of themes, promoted new directors, encouraged co-productions with the state, he created a new promotion department to the film industry, and began to concentrate on improving the distribution and exhibition of Mexican films."

Within the months of Rodolfo's entry into the Banco Nacional Cinematográfico, three new progressive companies sprang up which, with the state's help, wound up producing a majority of the films produced independently during the *sexenio:* Marco Polo Productions, Alpha Centauri, and Scorpion Productions. At the same time the Banco itself began support of films that in another time might never have been screened. Two of these films were *Reed—Mexico Insurgente,* by Paul Leduc, and *El Aguila Descalza,* directed by and starring the popular Mexican comic, Alfonso Arau.

Paul Leduc's film, made in 16mm and later blown up for 35mm release, was based on John Reed's account of the Mexican Revolution. The film version was actually produced independently prior to Rodolfo Echeverría coming to office, but fortunately, once produced it was bought by the state, and widely promoted as an example of the new kind of film-making. "My film was made in 1969, before Rodolfo came into power," explains Leduc, "and though he did not influence its filming, he certainly had a great deal to say about it afterwards. Public pressure and pressure from film critics had virtually forced Echeverría to legalize the film, but thereafter, to his surprise, it was very popularly received."

Similarly, Alfonso Arau's film, *El Aguila Descalza,* a fresh satirical farce revolving around the adventures of a Mexican superman hero, El Aguila (the eagle), who befriends the underdog in Mexican popular life, was also produced independently. As with Leduc's film, it took pressure from critics to convince Rodolfo Echeverría to release the film commercially. But once released, it proved an overwhelming box-office and artistic success, winning five "Arieles" (Mexican Oscars) when these awards were revived in 1970. Looking back, Arau says, "Both films, *El Aguila Descalza* and *Reed—Mexico Insurgente,* were films of a political nature, more obvious in Leduc's film and through satire in my film, but still political. Because they were produced indepen-

dently they offered a new perspective, one that would influence other directors, though perhaps not until a year or two later."

Another of the films to consciously express the social concerns later articulated emphatically by Echeverria was the 1970 production of *Calzonzin Inspector,* also directed by and starring Alfonso Arau. The film, based on Gogol's *Inspector General* short story, and on the fictional characters of Leftist cartoonist Ruis's "Los Supermachos," exposed the hypocrisy and corruption of many of Mexico's most revered institutions: government, the church, and the military.

Calzonzin, a humble Indian, visits a typical Mexican rural town. Unknown to him, the corrupt town officials await a visit from an "inspector general" to whom Calzonzin bears a remarkable resemblance. The Indian (Alfonso Arau), soon realizes the the townsfolk have mistaken him for the inspector and, knowing a good opportunity when he sees it, takes advantage of the situation and allows the guilt-ridden town fathers to shower him with gifts, bribes, and favors. All is well until he is confronted by the Indian population of the town who can only offer him flowers, fruits, and their livestock but who ask for justice and respect from the townsfolk—favors beyond Calzonzin's power to grant.

Later, the corrupt town fathers contrive the dedication of a new school to impress the inspector. Calzonzin's otherwise roguish character is again touched at the dedication; the Indian sensibility underneath the comedic pretense is moved to tears by the singing of the Mexican national anthem. As the camera intercuts the faces of the singing children with those of the corrupt officials, Arau for a moment reminds the viewer of what is at stake behind the farce of *Calzonzin Inspector:* the very ideals and principles of the Mexican Republic. Couched in with and satire, and with Arau's arresting smile, *Calzonzin Inspector* displays a clear and honest perception of Mexican hopes and aspirations while commenting bitterly on those who would betray these ideals.

With the commercial success of *El Aguila Descalza* and *Calzonzin Inspector,* and their official endorsement, other films soon began to direct themselves to social criticism; among them, the films of Felipe Casals.

Early in the Echeverría *sexenio,* Casals undertook two films of an historical nature with cautious political renderings: *Zapata* (1970) and *Aquellos Tiempos* (1972). Both historical dramas were antecedents to the kind of openly political films encouraged by the Echeverría directives. By 1974, Casals was ready to direct three films dealing in a more straightforward and contemporary manner with social criticism: *Canoa, El Apando,* and *Las Poquianchis.*

Canoa (1975) focuses on the tragic murder of several young employees of the University of Mexico by an enraged mob in the rural town of Canoa in 1968. At the time, the town priest, who was also the *cacique* (rural boss) of Canoa had been preaching to the town's people, warning them about the dangers of radical heretics and communists such as were to be found at the University of Mexico. One day a group of University workers (not students) were hiking in the hills near Canoa and were forced to take refuge from a thundershower in the town. Before the night was out, the priest had called out the citizens of the town and, together, they had captured, mutilated, and lynched three of the five unsuspecting young men. The incident, overshadowed by the infamous massacre at Tlatelolco, was not widely publicized at the time; the Casals film finally brought the story poignantly to the Mexican public.

The Casals film is distinguished by a filmic approach which blends simulated documentary footage and on-camera interviews with a narrative rendering of the events leading to the lynchings. The pacing of the film, while slower than that found in many North American films, keeps the

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viewer involved and makes credible the series of circumstances and attitude of the town people which made the tragedy possible. Actors Carlos Chavez, Roberto Sosa, Arturo Alegro, and Jaime Garza are convincing as the luckless young men. Enrique Lucero portrays the fanatical and domineering town priest, and Ernesto Gomez Cruz, who in 1977 would win the Mexican film industry's best actor award, is superb as the well-meaning, humble farmer who tries to defend the boys from the town's people but who is, himself, overcome and killed.

Canoa received wide promotion by Procinemex, the publicity department of the nationalized film industry, and set the scene for the next Casals film, *El Apando* (1976).

Where in *Canoa* Casals had utilized an innovative mix of simulated documentary and traditional narrative styles, in *El Apando* he failed to achieve as interesting a cinematographic form or as clear a social statement. The film's title refers to the maximum security "hole" in Mexico's infamous and now defunct Lecumberri prison and is an exploration of the brutality and violence of the Mexican prison system. The film is based on a semi-autobiographical story by one of Mexico's leading Leftist intellectuals, the late José Revueltas. (It was Revueltas's sister, Rosaura, who played the lead in the classic, *The Salt of the Earth*).

Salvador Sanchez, Manuel Ojeda, and José Carlos Ruiz, three of the more important new Mexican actors, portray three incorrigible inmates at Lecumberri who are addicted to drugs. With the help of their girlfriends, played by Delia Casanova and Maria Rojo, and the mother of one of the men, played by Luz Cortazar, they arrange to have drugs brought into the prison. The three men are soon caught with the contraband and thereafter confined in the maximum security hole wherein much of the film takes place. Eventually, again with the help of their girlfriends, the three escape into the main prison yard, incite other prisoners to riot, and manage to kill several guards before they themselves are cut down.

While convincing in its depiction of prison brutality, *El Apando* suffers from excessively playing up drugs, sex, and lesbianism of female prison guards, and the moral corruption of the inmates; it thus diffuses its otherwise important commentary on the conditions in the Mexican prison system.

By 1976, Casals had collaborated with screenwriter Tomás Perez Turrent on several films. They now undertook to tell the story of a notorious case of Mexican prostitution in *Las Poquianchis* (1977). It was in the late fifties that three sisters in Mexico opened a brothel, "The Poquianchis," and stocked it with young girls who had been "bought" or kidnapped from rural farmland homes. In many cases destitute parents had virtually sold their daughters as bonded servants, thinking the girls would work as maids in the big city. It was not until the late sixties that the prostitution ring was broken up, and then only after many of the girls has been murdered or had themselves become killers.

The film begins with the sale of two young

El Apando

daughters (Tina Romero and Diana Bracho) of an indigent campesino (Jorge Martínez de Hoyos) to agents of the Poquianchis brothel. The men have promised the parents of the girls that they will find jobs for the girls in the city. The transparent lie is eagerly accepted by the father of the girls, Martínez de Hoyos, who needs the money the men offer to help feed the rest of his impoverished children. The girls are taken to the Poquianchis brothel and there raped and beaten into a life of prostitution. Next Casals develops some interesting intercutting between the parallel stories of the two daughters as they accustom themselves to domineering and brutal treatment by the callous sisters who run the brothel, played eloquently by veteran actresses Leonor Llausas and Malena Doria, and the futile efforts of the campesino father to organize a strike of serf farmers against the all powerful land barons of the region.

In the end, many years later, the dejected and beaten father hears of the murder scandal surrounding the Poquianchis group and turns up to look for his daughters. He finds to his horror that one of them has been murdered, attacked and beaten to death by a group of the prostitutes, including his other daughter. *Las Poquianchis* is an exposé of a bitter moment in recent Mexican history, but more importantly, is an indictment against an exploitive economic system that is today still at work in some parts of the Republic.

Perhaps the film most publicized by the Mexican film industry during the Echeverria period was not directed by a Mexican at all, but rather by a Chilean in exile—Miguel Littín. Prior to *Actas de Marusia* (here translated *Marusia Chronicle*), Littín had directed two films of significance in his native Chile, *El Chacal de Nahueltoro* (1968) and *La Tierra Prometida* (1973). With the fall of the Allende government, Littín was forced into exile and settled in Mexico. He was part of the drive by a group of young directors to infiltrate the rigid *Sección de Directores* (Director's Guild), and when the guild was finally pressured by Rodolfo Echeverría to permit entry of new directors, Littín was one of the first to enter.

Actas de Marusia opens with the arbitrary murder of one of the miners in the town of

Los Poquianchis

Marusia, in the north of Chile, an act which sets the tone for the bloody violence to be seen in much of the film. The protagonist of the film, a vagabond intellectual named Gregorio—played by Italian actor Gian Maria Volante—is fleeing the memory of a previous political massacre in which his wife has been killed. He arrives in Marusia and discovers that the miners there are desperate over their low wages and the daily

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abuses they suffer. A committee of miners is elected, and a strike plan formulated. Gregorio joins in. The miners know that if they can spread the strike to the neighboring towns, the Chilean military, with its limited troops, will be unable to handle all of the strikes and the miners will be able to paralyze the economy of Chile. They will finally have some leverage by which they can achieve their demands. The Chilean military, however, in collusion with foreign owners of the copper mines, also fear a national strike of miners. They decide that they must make an example of Marusia to avert any more disruptive activities in other towns. The town of Marusia will be destroyed.

From the moment that the train bearing Chilean troops leaves for the remote town of Marusia, the town's fate is sealed. Despite Gregorio's experienced advice, the naive and unpoliticized miners hope to make a deal with the approaching army and to recruit the soldiers into their struggle. This hope is quickly crushed when, after the troop train has been stopped by the gallant miners' wives who have laid themselves across the railroad tracks, the commander in charge orders the women summarily executed. Soon the attack on Marusia is on, with the army encountering the determined resistance from the now more politicized miners.

Inevitably the Chilean army is successful in overpowering the disorganized miners. Most of the women and children are spared, but the miners themselves are tortured and finally executed. Gregorio is singled out for particular humiliation and torture, but before he is killed, he manages to help three messengers escape to carry the Marusia chronicle he has written to the neighboring towns: "Learn from our mistakes, tell them of our disorganization." *Actas de Marusia,* more than any other Mexican film of this period, expresses unequivocally a Marxist ideology, and though set in the Chilean past, the parallels to contemporary Chile are obvious.

◀ ACTAS DE MARUSIA

Throughout *Actas de Marusia* Miguel Littín displays a mature directorial vision which allows eloquence in the carefully staged execution scenes, and a minimum of gore in the effective torture sequences, which reflects a subtle understanding of human psychology in the heated arguments between impassioned miners, and which elicits pathos in the ill-fated romance between Gregorio and the town schoolteacher (Diana Bracho). Littín's direction is further enhanced by the acting abilities of Gian Maria Volante, Salvador Sanchez, Claudio Obregón, Diana Bracho, and Patricia Reyes Spindola.

The most striking aspect of *Actas de Marusia,* however, is not its strong politics, its directorial finesse, or its fine acting, but the fact that the Mexican film industry would back the film to the extent that it did. In contrast to other films of the period, which varied in shooting time from 30 to 50 days, *Actas de Marusia* was allowed 65 days and a budget of over 1 million dollars (high for Mexican films of this period). The investment seems to have paid off—*Actas de Marusia* was the first Mexican film in many years to be nominated for Best Foreign Film in the United States by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (in 1975), and it was Mexico's entry at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival.

Shortly after *Actas de Marusia* was released, Mexican director Gonzalo Martínez Ortega finished his epic feature film, *Longitud de Guerra* (1976). The film is one of the most cinematographically accomplished films of the Echeverría *sexenio* and was nominated for Best Foreign Film in 1976.

Previous to *Longitud de Guerra,* Gonzalo Martínez had directed *El Principio* (1972), a film set in his native state of Chihuahua at the start of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. *El Principio* (*The Beginning*) analyzes the causes which provoked the Mexican Revolution by focusing on the relationship between the peons and the landed

gentry under the Porfirio Díaz regime. At the start of the Revolution, an effete landowner's son, David Domínguez Solis (Fernando Balzaetti), returns from Europe to find that his family home has been taken over by revolutionaries and that his father, Don Ernesto Domínguez, a tyrannical land baron (Narcisco Busquets) has been killed. David visits the family home and, in a series of flashbacks to his youth, remembers the unjust and arbitrary abuses exercised by his brutal father against the peons. The flashbacks serve to fill out the personal story of David's estrangement from his father and convincingly explains David's decision to join the revolutionary forces led by the very peons over whom his father was once master.

By 1975, Martínez was ready to undertake a more ambitious look at the causes of the Mexican Revolution. As the vehicle he chose the second of an intended trilogy of stories which focus on the rugged and independent-minded people of an often contested strip of territory in western Chihuahua known as the *longitud de guerra* (region of war). Martínez's projected trilogy would focus on the war with the Apaches of Chihuahua which was undertaken by Colonel Joaquin Terrazas in the early 1880's (*La Guerra Sin Gloria*), then tell of the heroic resistance of the town of Temochic against the abuses of the Porfirio Díaz tyranny in the late 1880's (*Temochic,* later retitled *Longitud de Guerra*) and lastly relate the final coming of age of the Mexican revolution in the story of revolutionary leader Pascual Orozco in the early 1900's (*Pascual Orozco—1910*). Only *Longitud de Guerra* has as yet been completed.

Longitud de Guerra begins in 1890. The men of the town of Temochic have returned from the war with the Apaches and have settled down with their families to a peaceful life of farming and ranching. They are led by a community and spiritual leader named Cruz Chavez (Bruno Rey) whom they prefer to follow instead of the municipal president (Victor Alcocer). When the governor of the state (Jorge Russeks) comes to Temochic and arbitrarily takes several paintings from the town church, Cruz Chavez and his people are outraged. Although the paintings are later returned, the fact that the people of Temochic have adopted as their patron saint, the "saint of Ca-

LONGITUD DE GUERRA ▶

LONGITUD DE GUERRA

bora," a local spiritual leader, further provokes the animosity of the Church. A Church emissary is sent to set the people of Temochic straight; he denounces their beliefs as heretical, and insults the congregation. Cruz Chavez, along with brothers Manual (Pedro Armendariz, Jr.), David (Jorge Humberto Robles), and Jesús José (Hector Saez), and their families decide the time has come to break with the established authority of the Church, and for that matter all civil authorities. The people of Temochic join the extended Cruz family and in the absence of honest government resolve to govern themselves and to continue believing in whomever they please. This renunciation of ecclesiastical and civil authority is too audacious a challenge to let pass—Porfirio Díaz orders the insurrection put down. Despite the reluctance of General José Manuel Muriel (Narciso Busquets) and General Genero Chacon (Ramón Menéndez) to commit wholesale slaughter, the town and its people are finally attacked by the federal forces. Despite a brilliant and heroic defense, in the end all but a few women and children are killed.

As in *Actas de Marusia,* the Martínez film focuses on the deliberate and senseless massacre

of a town and its men. Both films end with only a handful of women and children left to mourn over the ashen ideals for which brothers, fathers and sons have died. The two films differ significantly, however, on the very issue of conflict and resistance.

In *Marusia* the protagonists struggle against labor exploitation and, by the end of the film, have clear political (socialist) objectives in mind. The revolt in Temochic, on the other hand, is precipitated by the pure country honesty of the people of that area. Explains Martínez, "These people, historically, maintained a pure, direct attitude towards questions essential to life—love, truth, justice, and basic human dignity. Whereas in other parts of Mexico at this time people were putting up with the hypocrisy and abuses of the Díaz government, in Temochic the people were incapable of allowing such abuses, or offenses against their basic human dignity." Though *Marusia* is clearly the more politically controversial of the films, it is also noteworthy that the Temochic story, which had first been suggested for filming as early as the 1940's, was only now allowed to be filmed.

Late in the Echeverría *sexenio* two other notable films of social character were produced which overlapped into the subsequent Lopez Portillo presidency: *Cascabel* (1977) and *La Casta Divina* (1977). Both films reveal outstanding cinematography, high production values, and creative acting.

Cascabel (Rattlesnake) relates the story of a stage director who is commissioned by the Mexican government to innocuously document the life of the Lacandón Indians, one of Mexico's more indigent Native American people, and discovers in the course of his filming that he must instead denounce the contradictions in governmental treatment of the Indians.

As the film opens, Alfredo Castro (Sergio Jimenez) is asked to cut out controversial parts from his latest stage production; if he doesn't the manager of the theater will be forced to close down the play. Alfredo reluctantly agrees to the cuts. Shortly thereafter, a producer in the state-run film company (Raul Ramirez) offers Alfredo his directorial debut in film if only he will adhere to a previously censored and edited script. Alfredo, egged on by his girlfriend (Norma Herrera), who accuses him of never taking a risk for fear of being compromised, decides to accept the challenge.

Within weeks, Alfredo is in the Southern state of Chiapas filming Lacandón Indians among pre-Columbian ruins. There he meets a Lacandón caught in the uneasy transition from traditional Indian lifestyle to western cosmopolitanism. Chankín is a Lacandón translator and guide who incongruously wears Indian dress with western sunglasses and short-cut hair and who is brilliantly portrayed by actor Ernesto Gomez Cruz. As Alfredo gets to know more and more about the Lacandón situation, and despite the considered advice of his cameraman (Aaron Hernan), he begins sending back controversial interviews and dailies which are not included in the script. Finally the political nature of his film-making becomes apparent to the producer and the state functionary sponsoring the film project (Mario Cid). Alfredo is relieved of his job.

On the last evening of his stay with the Lacandóns, Chankín's wife goes into labor. Simultaneously, a rattlesnake crawls into Alfredo's sleeping bag while the director prepares to sleep. In the provocatively edited final moments of the film, a clear relationship is developed between Alfredo's inevitable death, the price of his moral convictions, and the hypocritical forces which will continue to keep Chankín and his newly born child impoverished.

CASCABEL ▶

In *Cascabel* director Raul Arraiza takes full advantage of the filmic theme of his story to illuminate the plight of the Lacandóns and to experiment with filmic form. The footage which the protagonist Alfredo sends back to the producer for review is in fact authentic man-in-the-street interviews which director Arraiza himself shot for *Cascabel,* interviews in which a cross section of real Mexicans speak out about their government and the Lacandón situation. Thus Arraiza accomplishes a sort of documentary-within-a-feature, a form which serves to emphasize a major contradiction of contemporary Mexico—the glorification of the Indian past at the same time that so many of Mexico's contemporary Indians live in abject poverty. The film challenges as well the limits of Mexico's new cinematographic censors. Both are delicate and controversial areas through which Raul Arraiza manages to step with brilliance and insight.

La Casta Divina, directed by Julian Pastor, chronicles the moral corruption and eventual destruction of a family of rich landowners in the remote state of Yucatan in the period just prior to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. During this time, the white landowners thought of themselves as a "Divine Race," feudal masters over thousands of indentured Indian servants who were treated virtually as slaves. With the encroaching armies of Mexican revolutionaries everyday coming closer to the Yucatán bastion of landowner supremacy, the film examines the disintegration of family values as the landowners pathetically try to hold on to the myth of themselves as the divine race. Eventually the local Indians rise up and leave bloody and irrevocable proof of the mortality of the landowners.

The foregoing examples suggest only some of the many themes of social criticism touched on during the six years of the Echeverría presidency. Films were produced on corrupt politicians, such as Alfonso Arau's *Calzonzin Inspector* and Raphael Baledon's *Renuncia Por Motivos de Salud; Canoa* and *Las Poquianchis,* and Julian Pastor's *La Casta Divina;* the prison system in Casals' *El Apando* and the documentary *Palacio Negro* by Arturo Ripstein; the plight of Mexico's Indian population in *Juan Perez Jolote* by Archibaldo Burns, Paul Leduc's documentary *Mezquital,* and Raul Arraiza's *Cascabel:* political satire in Pepe Estrada's *Maten Al León* and Alfonso Arau's *El Aguila Descalza;* the life of the urban poor in Luis Alcoriza's *Mecanica Nacional,* Jorge Fons's *Los Albaniles* and Gabriel Retes's *Tin-Tin El Teporocho;* the Chicano struggle in *Chicano* by Jaime Casillas and this author's *Raices de Sangre;* Marxism in Miguel Littín's *Actas de Marusia,* the class struggle in Sergio Olhovich's *Encuentro De Un Hombre Solo* and *Llovisna,* and working socialism in Alfonso Arau's as yet unreleased documentary on Cuba, *Caribe: Estrella y Aguila.*

Other films explored controversial history. Alberto Bojorquez's *Hermanos del Viento* (1976) takes place in the period just after the Mexican-American War and focuses on the continued resistance by Mexicans who remained in the territory conquered by the United States. Marcella Fernandez Volante's *Cananea* (1977) explores US copper interests at the Greene Copper Company of Cananea, Sonora, in 1908. The film relates the unsuccessful strike by Mexican miners against Greene and other US interests in Mexico. Other films dealt directly with the Mexican Revolution and, to one degree or another, analyzed its causes: Paul Leduc's *Reed—Mexico Insurgente* (1969), Felipe Casals's *Zapata* (1970), Gonzalo Martínez's *El Principio* (1972) and Alberto Isaac's *Cuartelazo* (1972).

Not all films made during the Echeverría *sexenio,* of course, dwelt on social criticism or political themes. During his term as Director of the Banco Nacional Cinematográfico, Rodolfo Echeverría attempted to enliven Mexican film-making in more ways than by merely expanding its content. One example of this was his invitation to inter-

Treviño's RAICES DE SANGRE ▶

Los Pequeños Privilegios

national film stars to contribute their talents to the Mexican film industry—such as Peter O'Toole, Charlotte Rampling, and Max Von Sydow in Arturo Ripstein's *Foxtrot* and Gian Maria Volante in *Actas de Marusia.*

Another innovation was the encouragement of cinematographic renderings of important Mexican and Latin American literary works. This trend, at least recently, had begun in such films as *Los Caifanes* (1967) (co-authored by Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes and its director Juan Ibañez), *En Este Pueblo No Hay Ladrones* (1965) (based on the Gabriel García Márquez short story) and the filmic rendering by Jorge Fons of Maria Vargas Llosa's *Los Cachorros* (1971). During the Echeverría period other literary works were transformed into films: the remake of Mariano Azuela's *Los de Abajo* (1977), the remake of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo* (1977) directed by Jose Bolaños, the film version of *Xoxontla* (1977) written by Angel Calvo de la Torre and directed by Alberto Mariscal, and the superb adaptation of José Donoso's novel *Coronación* (1976) by director Sergio Olhovich.

Other films not having themes directly of social criticism also deserve mention in that they help to round out an accurate sense of the new wave film-making—such is the case with *El Topo*(1970) by Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Muñeca Reina*)1971) by Sergio Olhovich, *El Castillo de la Pureza* (1972) by Arturo Ripstein, *El Rincón de las Virgenes* (1972) by Alberto Isaac, *El Elejido* (1976) by Servando Gonzalez, *La Pasión Según Berenice* (1976) directed by Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, *La Mejor de Teresa* (1977) by Alberto Bojorquez, *Los Pequeños Privilegios* (1977) by Julian Pastor, *La Güera Rodriguez* (1977) by Felipe Casals, *El Jardin de los Cerezos* (1977) by Gonzalo Martinez and *Naufragio* (1977) by Jaime Humberto Hermosillo.

It would be incorrect to think that none of the social criticism films previously mentioned would have been made without Echeverría's support. The drive and creativity of the new directors and new writers, the impetus of new actors, the demands for new themes by Mexican audiences, and the film industry's own impatience with the *churros* would certainly have been felt in some way. But it is equally unlikely that the superb quality achieved in many of these films—their *auteur*-selected themes, and their commerical success—would have been possible without the support and artistic freedom conferred on the new directors by the Echeverría government. "I think it was the coming together, at the right time of the right elements," comments Gonzalo Martínez, "we had new directors, new writers and new actors, and the proper support by Echeverría. Both of which were profoundly affected by the events of 1968, from then on the government itself saw the need to bring about certain changes."

The most interesting question yet remains. To what degree is the new film-making a fluke in the Mexican cinema experience and to what degree does it signal a lasting possibility for a new cinema? The answer to this difficult question can only be tentatively surmised from the changes that have occurred since January, 1977, when the Lopez Portillo appointees at various levels of the

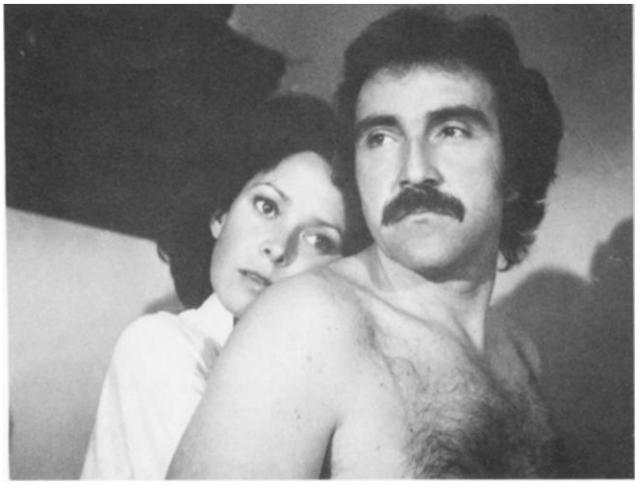
film industry began their restructuring of the industry and its priorities. Paramount in the changes which have taken place is a reduction in film financing, the return of the old-style "private" producers, the freezing of filming opportunities for some of the new wave directors of the Echeverría *sexenio,* and increased co-productions with foreign producers.

In September of 1976, on the eve of leaving office, Echeverría complicated the subsequent financing of motion pictures by announcing the long overdue devaluation of the peso—the first such devaluation in 20 years. It was not surprising, then, that in the financial belt-tightening that followed, one of the first actions to be taken by the new Banco appointees was a reduction of film monies. Post-production budgets on films started in the Echeverría *sexenio* were modified and budgets for new films were cut to the present average of about three or four hundred thousand dollars—about half of the average during the previous Echeverría years.

The old-style "private" producers soon returned in force and, in collaboration with the Banco, have undertaken films of modest budgets where capital return and profits are more likely. These films are more concerned with "entertainment," a euphemism for films that do not attempt social or political themes, and many of these films have, predictably, retraced the familiar formulas of sex, violence and melodrama.

As for the new directors, many have found it difficult to obtain new film assignments in the revamped Banco policies, or have refused co-production ventures with the Banco because of the "entertainment" emphasis now demanded by the Banco. Some of the new directors claim their films have been sloppily released, only at the worst theaters, while others allege that their films have been denied admittance to foreign film competitions. The Banco, meanwhile, in an effort to better invest the limited monies available for film production after the devaluation, has actively solicited co-productions with the United States.

Still, many of the new wave directors have not idly accepted the changes that have occurred. Many refuse to direct the new *churros* and instead have put the wealth of their experience, talent and resources to continuing the kind of



La Pasion Seguin Berenice

film-making they mastered in the Echeverría period. Director Gonzalo Martínez is positive about what has been accomplished: "There are major advances we have made in the past six years that are irreversible, things that cannot be changed even if the government wanted to. But then I don't think the government wants to take backward steps."

Supporting this view is the fact that the liberalized censorship code established by Echeverría remains; not all Mexican cinema need return to the status of *churros.* Some directors have responded to the new era by creating their own alternatives to Banco financing, such as the two cooperatives, "Tercarela" and "Rio Mixcoac." By means of these cooperatives new wave directors hope to continue with their own kind of film-making.

"Independent of what the state may do, or of the film-making of the old-style private producers, we have launched our own group of independent film-makers," explains Sergio Olhovich, now speaking for a coalition of film directors known as the Frente Nacional de Cinematografistas (The United National Front of Cinematographers). "Many people want to return to the old style of film-making, but they don't understand that it won't work anymore. On the other hand, there is a strong group of us, many of us, who refuse to be a part of this kind of film-making that merely manufactures films. We are committed to a kind of cinema that is culturally and artistically motivated. We maintain that our Mexican cinema must be defended not merely by commercial considerations but by its quality."

WILLIAM F. VAN WERT

Chris Marker: The SLON Films

The mere mention of political film-making in France after the turmoil of May 1968 is synonymous for most Americans with the name of Jean-Luc Godard and the now-defunct Dziga-Vertov Group which he spearheaded with Jean-Pierre Gorin.[1] Few people know that French collective-film-making derives from Chris Marker, who formed a film co-operative SLON (Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles) to make *Loin du Vietnam (Far From Vietnam,* 1967). The film was a protest against continued American involvement in Vietnam and embodied segments by various film-makers whom Marker had gathered together for the project: Godard, Alain Resnais, Claude Lelouch, Agnes Varda, Joris Ivens and William Klein. It took someone of Marker's incredible persuasiveness to bring these artists together and fuse their work into one coherent statement. And Marker's presence literally "sandwiched" the various segments of the other film-makers: he was both producer and editor, and thus responsible for both pre- and post-production.

After the events of May 1968, during which Marker and Godard both made numerous *cinétracts,*[2] Marker revived the SLON group and committed himself totally to collective film-making. Mediating between film technicians and factory workers, he took film's technology and process out of the studios and movie theaters, allowing the workers to make films about themselves, study the films and form ongoing collectives around such films. In this way Chris Marker, while shrouding himself in an enigmatic obscurity, has given birth to most of the leading political film collectives still operating in France.[3]

At the same time that he was transforming political film activity in France itself, Marker and the SLON group (Valérie Mayoux, Jean-Claude Lerner, Alain Adair, John Tooker and others) remained very active abroad, making three films of note after *Far From Vietnam: La Sixième Face du Pentagone* (Marker and François Reichenbach, 1968), about the peace march on Washington; *La Bataille des dix millions (The Battle of the 10,000,000*—Marker and Mayoux, 1970), about a failure in the Cuban sugar crop; and *Le Train en marche (The Train Rolls on*—Marker, 1971), a combination of archive footage about the Russian agit-prop trains of the twenties and an interview with the Soviet film-maker most responsible for many of the films made on those trains, Alexander Medvedkin. This latter film was the result of meetings in Paris between Medvedkin and Marker in 1971, and it served as a kind of prologue to the re-release of Medvedkin's first feature-length film *Schastye (Happiness,* 1934).[4]

Significantly, all three SLON films correspond in interesting ways to three earlier Marker films about the same locales: *Lettre de Sibérie (Letter From Siberia,* 1957), a biting satire-travelogue about the Soviet Union; "L'Amérique rêve" ("The American Dream," 1959), a scenario never filmed about America; and *Cuba Sí (Cuba Yes,* 1961), a compilation film with numerous still photographs of Cuba under the Castro regime in its early stages. There is a great deal to be learned about the political evolution of one of the most formative cinematic minds of our time in comparing Marker's America then and now, his Russia then and now, his Cuba then and now, both in terms of subject and film form. This comparison is the subject of my study.

An inveterate traveler, Marker launched in the early fifties a reasonably priced, although lushly illustrated, series of books collectively entitled "Petit Planète," with each book in the series giving a subjective, personal and sometimes poetic impression of a foreign country, but backed up by facts and figures to support such an impression. The idea for, and implementation

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of, the series predates any of Marker's documentary films. The point here is that "Petit Planète" as a metaphor informs all of his film work: the foreign country viewed in images of eccentricity and contradiction, viewed primarily for a spectator who has never been there (thus, the *image-témoin* or "eye-witness" format), and commented upon by a subjective text which replaces the usual "dead" language of most guide-books and internally sponsored documentaries. In fact, as André Bazin noted, Chris Marker is primarily a writer, a creative writer making films: "Chris Marker is of the new generation of writers who think that the time of the image has come but who don't say that it's necessary to sacrifice to the image the power and virtue of a language which remains the special interpreter of the mind, the intelligence. What this means is that for Chris Marker the commentary of a film isn't what is added to images that have already been pre-arranged and fixed, but rather it's almost the first and foremost element . . ."[5]

It was in *Letter From Siberia* that Marker first demonstrated his idiosyncratic eye and acerbic wit in the merger of found footage and invented text. Siberia is, of course, that part of the Soviet Union which for Marker embodies the past, the folklore and mythology absent in modernization, the eccentricities and contradictions that are missing in Moscow. Marker begins with a Yakut legend as a basis for attacking the "super-powers" through wit rather than polemics:

> The Siberian proverb states that the devil created the forest. The devil makes things well. His forest in its entirety is as big as the United States. Of course, it's also true that he may have created the United States.

Later in the film, Marker confesses to having juxtaposed shots of Russian fire-planes with shots of fires blazing in Montana. His political comment on his own falsification through editing, which demystifies the whole notion of "documentary reality," is the following:

> Being a little bit short on footage and thinking that all forest fires are pretty much alike, I didn't think I was betraying documentary reality by inserting a few frames furnished by Pathé-Journal Newsreel. But since these frames are of Montana, maybe I should point out that

FAR FROM VIETNAM

this is the first film ever made to show, as a foreshadowing of co-existence, Russian fire-planes putting out an American fire.

Thus, Marker pokes fun simultaneously at power politics and the documentary form. At one point in the film he cuts away from a tongue-in-cheek dissertation on reindeer, based loosely on scientific and consensus fact, to a mock television commercial which carries the reindeer's utilitarian value to the absurd, including showing Alfred E. Newman of *Mad Magazine* fame eating Reindeer Flakes for breakfast. At another point, he contrives to create an "imaginary" documentary that begins with a look-alike of Nanook of the North and ends with Sputnik. The images, thus, contradict each other, from Siberia's own flat landscapes to Marker's invented fantasies. Yet both kinds of images, mediated by the ironic edge of the spoken text, comment on the same things: ridiculing the technological advances of Siberia, lamenting the loss of poetry and folklore to apparent social progress, mourning the loss of individuality that in Marker's vision is aligned with the past and pre-political.

Never filmed, "L'Amérique rêve" remains a photo-essay, a superimposition of wry commentary on still photographs. But the characteristic traits of *Letter From Siberia* are all there in an even more abrupt and transparent state, since the editing process of film is missing. Marker uses the format of a television commercial, itself speeded-up and scattershot, to suggest the bubble of the American Dream: "The American Dream, everything you've seen in this film, it's a dream. A good American dream: wash-and-wear, unbreakable, with a one-year guarantee."

The underlying assumption of the travelogue is that the spectator will not have seen the country first-hand. And for Marker, the travelogue functions to unearth the invisible from the visible: the lack of a culture in America, characterized by a decline in the arts and a rise in technology; the commercialized "dream" that can be bought and sold, because America never had a past; colonialism (a form of consumerism) with its concomitant offspring, cultural stupidity. Marker juxtaposes photographs of the "old" West (hills, forests, desert) with those of the New West (cars, skyscrapers, urban sprawl). His commentary suggests that the expropriation of the lands of the Indians was paid for with the sacrifice of a cultural memory: "The territorial conquest brought into opposition the Indians with the newly-arrived Europeans. In the process the Indians lost their lives, and the Europeans their memory."

If the price for colonializing America was the sacrifice of a cultural memory that formerly linked America with Europe, then a further consequence of that amnesia is the isolationism of America, expressed by Marker through the metaphor of photography. Americans do not trust what they see, unless it can be replicated by Kodak. The rise in technology has created the mechanistic and mannered way in which Americans travel and view the rest of the world.

> No country is completely real, no moment is really lived as long as the photographic image is not fixed. And for many Americans, reality is only an inner room of photography. So don't be surprised to see them running around the world without seeing it, using their Kodaks like a Colt .45 to cover their retreat. And once back in their armchairs, in the presence of a photo album or a slide projector, they will relax, they will begin to love the world, they will begin to travel.

Marker personifies the natural world and all objects, including billboards, comic strips and photographs, while dehumanizing the human beings, showing them as objects trapped in their own landscape. Marker "visits" Ghost Town in Hollywood to show that Americans revere what is dead or immobilized (like the Kodak pictures), at the same time that they become the inhabitants of Ghost Town by visiting it.

Marker's method seems clear enough. Either he picks famous landmarks like Ghost Town or Disneyland and then superimposes his own ironic point of view in the text or else he picks "oddities" and curiosa, like the Siamese-twins' contest or the prison-farm rodeo, letting the eccentricity speak for itself. The "topics" covered by Marker's travelogue, thus, include the following:

—San Francisco (with quotes from Jean Cocteau)
—Cults of youth in America
—Contrasts between art and advertising
—Ghost Town and Disneyland
—Huntsville prison farm and its rodeo
—The role of eating in America
—The psychology of parents in bringing up children
—The importance of newspapers in America
—Auto-racing (with stills from racing films and comments on method acting)
—Husband-catching by women (with stills from a Miss America contest)
—Discussion of Americans as being cats or dogs, with quotes from Cocteau
—Mardi Gras in New Orleans with a discussion of the use of masks (juxtaposed with images from a police line-up)
—The Holy Rollers and how emotions are channeled in America
—The phenomenon of gambling in Las Vegas
—Skyscrapers in Chicago and New York

We are pretty far removed from the "serious" testament of a de Tocqueville here. Marker has weaned the travelogue format from a fawning, sometimes mawkish appraisal of democracy to the raw food of alienating and uncontrollable technology, with its newness and sameness, and the idiot trivia of a Charles Kuralt on the road, seeking pockets of the rural past and exotica that test the sameness of the buildings and the photographs through "deviations" in human personality. The point to be made here is that Marker's text controls the entire project. Run silently, his early documentaries are an interesting, but random babble.

Differences in his emerging style were clearly due to differences in subject. When he dealt with a super-power (Russia in *Lettre de Sibérie,* China in *Dimanche à Pékin* (1955), America in "L'Amérique rêve"), he fragmented what he saw into bizarre bifurcations, concentrating on colonialism, lack of culture, eccentricities and stupidities.

By contrast, when he dealt with an emerging nation—the Israel of *Description d'un combat* (1960), the Cuba of *Cuba Sí* (1961), the Mexico of "Soy Mexico" (1965)[6]—he chose to stress the authenticity of the people within their struggle, emphasizing their dignity and their grandeur. In the embryonic beginnings of a *cinéma vérité* for which Marker would become famous in *Le Joli Mai* (1963-65),[7] he allowed the people of the country visited to move about more. With less selective posing, Marker's camera assumes the stance of privileged observer. The images strive for candor. The text, in turn, becomes more "educational," because it intends to trace a history rather than a fantasy.

Cuba Sí is perhaps Marker's most successful juxtaposition of candid-camera images with a poetic, admiring text in this period. Because the Bay of Pigs invasion took place while Marker was editing the film, he "revised" his text for the first half of the film to include an especially strong anti-American stance. Marker listed a litany of nationalized industries, in order to show that a more authentic Cuba had been born; on the other hand, he noted that there was a recourse to mythology abroad to explain the nationalizations, as though Fidel Castro were some kind of simpleton, a naive and perhaps noble-hearted caricature: "But for the rest of the world, and especially for the Americans, it was easier to revive the myths. Fidel Castro, he was Robin Hood."

Breaking with his earlier filtering of the foreign country entirely through the "eye-witness" of the falsifying narrative text, Marker divided *Cuba Sí* structurally into two parts: his Cuba and Castro's Cuba. The first half of the film belongs to Marker's vision and consists of his ironic observations or poetic recitations on the new Cuba. This section includes musical notations like "scherzo" and "andante" for the recitation of the text. And this section ends on a litany that places Cuba in a historical context:

> What did people talk about in the world at this moment?
> about people, about countries and imaginary animals,
> about Algeria,
> about France,
> about America,
> about space,
> about time,
> about the Congo,
> about Laos,
> about Africa,
> and the forms that they took in the second half of this century, both violence and prayer.
> The Apocalypse was also written. It was the most expensive book in the whole world.
> It was then that people in the world began also to talk about Cuba.[8]

Against this poetic backdrop, in which the revolutions and acquired independence of small nations like Cuba were related with the Apocalypse, the long section on Castro is introduced. In this final section the images portray an angry Castro, a humorous Castro, a dedicated and candid Castro, whose voice replaces Marker's as spoken text. The shift informs the technique of all of the later SLON films. Marker's peep-hole camera pulls back; his own voice goes mute and anonymous. The camera as surgical tool gives way to the camera as archive instrument, preserving Castro's uninterrupted speech for posterity.

On a formal level, of course, Marker's predilection for still photographs is the middle step in the process from a camera that calls attention to itself and that raises questions to be resolved in the editing and in the text to a fixed-spectator camera of little movement, long takes and shallow depth of field. The camera, then, obeys the text, which for the first time, issues from the subject. In fact, there are no "native speakers" in either *Lettre de Sibérie* or "L'Amérique rêve." In those two film projects, Marker's own narration structures what, otherwise, is a silent film! And in *Cuba Sí* the long recitative which serves as a transition device between Marker's Cuba and Castro's (ironic in that it is expressed totally in Castro's face and hands) is Marker's approximation of the rhythms and repetitions in Castro's speeches.

What looks like a total about-face in Chris Marker's method is, in fact, a complete merger of theory and practice, both predicated on the idea of collective film-making toward a political purpose. The anonymity he has exhibited in sharing his resources and know-how and influence with factory workers, in "giving it all away," finds its parallel anonymity in the SLON films,

in which the austerity in style allows a Medvedkin or a Castro to emerge, as though from the shadows, perhaps more fully than they could in person, certainly more fully and more forcefully than they have in any other media portraits.

The so-called sixth face of the Pentagon in *La Sixième Face du Pentagone* refers to the "people," rendering unto the thousands who took part in the peace march on Washington the status of an "estate," a collective power which in Marker's vision had enough impact on Richard Nixon to turn the Vietnam War around. On the surface, of course, Marker couldn't have been further from the original scenario for "L'Amérique rêve." No suggested mythology, no recourse to folklore, no urbane study of the off-beat. Marker and Reichenbach have fixed their vision on *one* finite historical moment. Marker's pattern in "L'Amérique rêve" of moving from the quaint and inexplicably particular (the Siamese-twin contest, the prison-farm rodeo) to the broom-sweep generalization gives way in *La Sixième Face du Pentagone* to a kind of "March of Time" format (but non-condensed, more shown than narrated, more found than staged). The Marker-Reichenbach film exists as a kind of corrective for the abridged and edited versions of the peace march on our own TV networks, the only other visual record we have, just as the *ciné-tracts* of 1968 provided an "alternate" news format from that provided by the self-censored Gaullist television news. In the original sense in which the French first defined "documentary," the Marker-Reichenbach film is more document than film, more historical moment-preserved than exposition of aesthetic possibilities (even though critics of the film pointed out that the marchers were definitely shown from a stance of sympathy, while the police and the president seem locked in their own power).

The Battle of the 10,000,000 is a docu-text in the same vein, although more direct, because it comes to focus on one person—Castro. Here Marker operates within a dialectic of two different Castro speeches, one made prior to the *zafra* (sugar-crop harvest), in which Castro reveals the high stakes for the Cuban economy, and the other made on the 26th of July, 1970, in which Castro acknowledges the failure of the *zafra* and attempts an analysis of the reasons for the failure. The rigor with which Marker undertakes his own dialectic of analysis/preserved document is underscored by Jacques Demeure:

> But with a style purified by a severity which he has never before pushed to this extent. Of those brilliant effects of the past, there remains scarcely none except for a brief evocation (using a reverse angle shot) of what might be that conversation between Lenin and Castro which one Cuban dreams of, and some formulas which are meant to be more striking than seductive. Austerity predominates, in perfect harmony with the country described by the film.[9]

And yet, within the confines of the two Castro speeches, Marker finds time to attack America and cast doubt upon the Soviet influence in Cuba. But, contrary to his past experience, his wit in this film informs and fleshes out concrete current events of the time. Slogans on the walls suggest parallels between Cuba and Vietnam, since the United States had blockaded both countries. The Statue of Liberty is shown with devil's horns around her head. And animation introduces the topic of US intervention: Clark Kent changes into Superman costume, a prelude to announcing that two fishing boats had been captured. Castro's on-going speech is intercut with shots of the boats in the Cuban harbor. The shot of the harbor reinforces the fish-imagery with which the Cubans view the Americans—"barracuda" and "man-eating shark"—denoting the dangerous waters between the two countries. Finally, Nixon is burned in effigy, a comment both on the present intervention and a past intervention: Nixon's visit to Batista in 1955. The effigy image of Nixon, then, brings us full-circle, in terms of animation, to the Clark Kent/Superman image which introduced the topic.

And within Marker's dialectical process, this intervention is contrasted with, and offset by, another form of intervention: 60,000 Cubans donating blood to the Peruvian earthquake victims, a concrete example of solidarity among emerging nations, with the donation of blood to be understood figuratively as well as literally.

Thematically, the film would appear to be simple, perhaps overly so: Castro urges a record sugar crop, since Cuba is a one-crop economy; they have a record crop, but it's not enough; Castro admits to failure and posits the reasons for the failure. The ideal, as expressed by Castro,

is simple enough: "When in this country not a single man will have to cut the cane with a machete we will have accomplished something . . . we will have transformed the work of an animal into really humane work." But the realities are very complex, especially in the irony that moving from the machete to advanced technology makes for "really humane work," and especially in the difficulties in needing a record crop of the only crop available for the economy to stay afloat, while needing at the same time to diversify and support other economic alternatives (among them, tourism!).

Marker's and Mayoux's musical sound track emphasizes the complexity of the problem by moving from the classical music of Castro's first speech prior to the *zafra* to the Beatles and "Golden Slumbers" for the last speech, both of them serving as counterpoint (since they are not "represented" visually) with the songs and chanting of the Cuban people between the speeches, which are represented, both visually and aurally.

Structurally speaking, the film is fascinating in terms of the progression of the film *qua* film(s) and the exploration of the role of the media in the film. Marker and Mayoux begin with Castro's speech of hope for the *zafra,* but it is a "boxed" speech, an excerpt from television, a nice formal touch for showing the past-ness of the speech. In the "middle" of the film, Castro moves from the signs of "No Hay" to the agit-prop films of Santiago Alvarez (also the cameraperson for *Battle*) and the Noticieros del ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficas), creating a dialectic between the inner films and the outer film which encases them. While serving as cameraperson for Marker and Mayoux and the SLON group, Alvarez also made agit-prop films during the time of the *zafra,* including *No Hay* (on rationing) and *Despegue a las 18.* The contrast is striking. While Alvarez and his group depicted the *zafra* in heroic and lyrical terms, Marker and the SLON group show their opposite (the Alvarez clips within their film), while, for their own part, encouraging an austerity in form, didacticism, clarity, a refusal of lyricism.

The third stage in the dialectic of film form under scrutiny (that is, which form or forms most appropriately convey the subject?) is the brief

BATTLE OF THE TEN MILLION: *Fidel Castro*

reverse-angle shot, stemming from a "dream" of a Cuban citizen and reproducing what can never be reproduced: a dialogue between Castro and Lenin. Again, the refusal of lyricism is evident. The enormous place that dreams occupied in Marker's former vision is here reduced to the reverse-angle shot, which creates a double refusal: refusal of dreams and wished-for linkages with the past when Castro's final speech speaks to the present and future and refusal of the dream/imaginary in terms of film form.

The final shot-sequence of Castro speaking directly to the camera must be understood, then, as the most appropriate form for the film *after* all other forms have been shown and eliminated. This final speech contrasts sharply with (1) the earlier televised *excerpt,* in that, this time, the speech is reproduced in its entirety and without any TV lines to blur the image; (2) with the agit-prop films of Santiago Alvarez and the newsreels of the ICAIC, in that these documents, by their emphasis on the "heroic" struggle, cannot admit any failure, while Castro's speech is *all about* failure; and (3) with the reverse-angle shot of Castro and Lenin, in that Castro's final speech seeks no justification for the failure of the *zafra* in dreams or in Lenin, and, quite the contrary, suggests the need to choose one's friends carefully, a suggestion of Cuban independence from their Soviet patrons. Castro even admits: "The imperialists are right in their critique but wrong in urging the path of counter-revolution."

Castro's candor, his admission of failure and self-criticism provide the dialectic on the spoken sound track which Marker and Mayoux duplicate in the making of the film. The two dialectics converge in the final speech, in the long take that

lets the subject assume the totality of the film apparatus, where the camera is fixed (transferring all emphasis onto the subject) and where the sound of the pro-filmic event—the speech—is the sound of the film.

Le Train en marche, a dialectical reassessment of *Lettre de Sibérie,* is probably the most complex of the SLON films in terms of structure, because it involves not only films within the film (the agit-prop films) but also a film outside of the film (Medvedkin's *Happiness*). Marker's film not only revives the Medvedkin film but also the entire process of the mobile film-train and the function it played in 1931 and 1932: to take film to the people, to show the people at work, to let them analyze their own production failures by means of the film, and to show them filmed comparisons with other workers and other factories. The SLON film not only attempts to rewrite history, emphasizing Medvedkin's role and that of the *ciné-trains* in light of the existing "history" of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dziga-Vertov, but it also serves as the basis for the formation of a working collective in the present, the French Medvedkin Group.

The SLON film assumes the symbolism of that time to accomplish its analysis. Marker quotes Lenin: "Of all the arts cinema is the most important . . ." His own title follows: "First the eye . . ." The symbolism of the eye comes from Eisenstein's *Strike* (1924). A still photograph of Eisenstein follows the title and reinforces the allusion. Only Marker's corrective reads: "Eisenstein brought it all. Medvedkin saw it all."

The train becomes the symbol of the revolution, following Lenin's directive. Literary quotes

LETTRE DE SIBERIE

and murals adorn the sides of the trains. "The image was sung:" Marker moves from a still photo of a phonograph to a close-up of a "real" phonograph, the voice of Lenin on it. Marker's following title: "And still the eye . . ." But the corresponding image is of Stalin and the narration that follows informs us: "Dziga-Vertov found the camera eye more perfect than the human eye."

In the space of a few brief shots and comments, Marker's film suggests the dialectic of the film-makers and the politicians, and the struggles between them. Beginning with Lenin, Marker moves to Eisenstein and Trotsky, then to Dziga-Vertov and Stalin, setting up a polar opposition between Eisenstein's invented behavioral montages and Dziga-Vertov's "found" subjects, corresponding to the oppositions between Trotsky's progressive tendencies and Stalin's hard-line pragmatics.

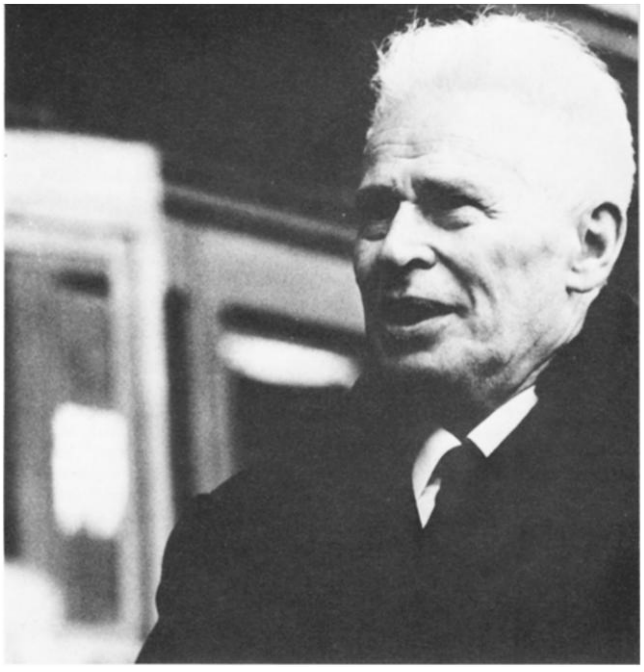
The SLON film would have Medvedkin as the inheritors of Lenin's directive for the cinema in terms of revolutionary activity. The choice of Medvedkin is a natural one, since Medvedkin, like Marker, gave up "personal" film-making, film-making of *auteur*-ship, to film the people and give film away to the people. As Marker states in the film: "The authors of a film are not just the film-makers or cameraman but the people who figure in the film."[10]

And, even though most of the agit-prop films are not lost, the SLON film is a historical reminder of their existence, and the creation of the French Medvedkin Group is a restoration of Medvedkin's film activity, if not his films. *Le Train en marche* is, then, a film in two sections. The first section discusses film "history" and details the available data and the methodology

◀ LE TRAIN EN MARCHE

(provided by Medvedkin) informing the *ciné-trains.* The second section, like the second section of *La Bataille des dix millions,* is an interview with the man whose spirit propels the first section. Medvedkin is interviewed in a train station. He talks about the *ciné-trains* and he talks about *Happiness,* but the image and the final word come from Marker. This train station is in Paris, and the stopped train behind Medvedkin is a modern one, one that has nothing to do with factory workers or cinema. But Marker's final comment re-proposes the synthesis in the dialectic of opposites (Medvedkin as an old man *vs.* the modern French train, the only "reconciliation" between them being the *ciné-train*) when he says: "The biggest mistake of all would be to believe that it (the *ciné-train*) has come to a halt."

Chris Marker's SLON films represent a radical point of departure (and commitment) in political film-making. They serve not only as historical correctives for distorted media portrayals (including no portrayals at all) of the Pentagon march, Castro's Cuba and Medvedkin's *ciné-trains,* but also as internal self-criticism of Marker's earlier depictions of America, Cuba and Russia. Marker has always operated outside of the normal production and distribution systems, but, at least in the earlier documentaries, critics and exhibitors could point to the single author, to stylistic flourishes, to wit and humor rendering the satire palpable even for those being satirized. But the new Marker rejects both the authorship and the stylistic indulgences. His "person" has been effectively effaced both inside and outside of the collective films. Austere in their style, more document than film, and still not feature-length, the SLON films have barely been written about, let alone shown. Marker is making films about and *for* his subjects, for committed (and restricted) audiences that can see the films outside of the normal distribution system, that can use the films for internal analysis and that can become filmmakers themselves. This kind of film, the film that gives film physically away to the spectator, would seem to me to be the only and ultimate goal of any political film-maker.



Alexander Medvedkin, interviewed in the contemporary Paris train station.

NOTES

1. Godard and Gorin actively encouraged the equation between the Dziga-Vertov Group and political activity in France through numerous pronouncements and interviews, none of which show much solidarity with, or indeed mention of, other political film-collectives. Indeed, of all intellectuals and film technicians, the Dziga-Vertov Group members never made any attempt to open up their internal process to workers and non-film-makers, which set up the basic contradiction that eventually split the Group: they were intellectuals making films that praised workers and criticized intellectuals, but which were seen by and large by intellectuals, not workers.

2. The *ciné-tracts,* on-the-street day-to-day newsreels to counter-balance the "news" of the Gaullist press and television, were a very direct means of opposition, not only to the established media, but also (1) to the "firing" of Henri Langlois at the Cinémathèque and (2) to the Cannes Film Festival, which was seen at that time as promoting bourgeois films. The sad thing about the *ciné-tracts* is that they were so short-lived.

3. Marker's activity was directly responsible for the formation of two collectives and indirectly inspired two others. The two directly formed through his interventions were the French-Medvedkin Group, which split off from SLON after the filming of *Le Train en marche* and another collective in Besançon, which resulted from a SLON film made there about a factory strike. In addition, Marker's *ciné-tract* activity seems to have been resumed in the print medium by way of two series of short bulletins on current events put out by SLON—*Nouvelle*

Société and *On vous parle.* I have also learned that SLON has changed its name to ISKRA, although I can't find any printed material to support this information.

4. The literal title of the Medvedkin film was *Styazhateli (Snatchers).* Made in 1934, it was quite a daring film at the time for its treatment of collective farming, which was an almost forbidden subject in the restrictive orthodoxy of Stalin's socialist realism.

5. Bazin's quote appears on the jacket of Chris Marker's *Commentaires I* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961).

6. The complete texts for *Les Statues meurent aussi, Dimanche à Pékin, Lettre de Sibérie,* "L'Amérique rêve," *Description d'un combat* and *Cuba Sí* are available in *Commentaires I. Le Mystère Koumiko,* "Soy Mexico" and "Si j'avais quatre dromadaires" are available in *Commentaires II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967). "Soy Mexico," itself an unfinished project, is a "re-make" of Eisenstein's unfinished *Que Viva Mexico* (1931). In fact, Eisenstein is the last and most effective "witness" in a list that includes Cortez, an anonymous worker, Maximillian and Emiliano Zapata in the Marker film project.

7. It was during the mid-sixties that Marker and Jean Rouch were critically touted as the pioneers of *cinéma vérité,* a term which has yet to be defined satisfactorily and which Marker, himself, disdains.

8. For a detailed discussion of all of Marker's early documentaries, see my *The Theory and Practice of the Ciné-Roman* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), pp. 170-190.

9. Jacques Demeure, "Sugar Cane, Fashion and Revolution (*The Battle of the Ten Million Tons*)," *Positif* (December 1970) translated by Nadine Covert (April 1971) and reproduced by New Yorker Films, which distributes both *La Bataille des dix millions* and *Le Train en marche* in 16mm in this country.

10. I find it difficult not to see in the SLON "history" of Soviet revolutionary film a justification for Medvedkin and SLON with a slight note of attack, not so much on Dziga-Vertov himself, but on the French Dziga-Vertov Group and Godard-Gorin as *authors.*

Reviews

NEA

Director: Nelly Kaplan. Screenplay: Nelly Kaplan and Jean Chapot. Cinematography: Andreas Winding. Producer: André Genovès.

Nea, directed by Nelly Kaplan, is an exquisitely controlled ironic fairy tale slowly unfolding into a mature, intelligent, and playful parable about what it is that many self-realizing, loving women have such trouble getting from a man these days —recognition that romantic love is valuable, honorable, thrilling, and not to be debased.

The controlling narrative and textural characteristics suggest that in this film, reality is to be seen as the mutual creation of: (1) self-conscious fictionalizing, (2) a set of givens ("The force of attraction is in proportion to the dictates of fate," an epigraph tells us), and (3) certain strongly held beliefs. Involving fictions within fictions and worlds within worlds, the film does not try to naturalize its material; rather, the discourse as a whole makes the delicate assertion that even though romantic love may be a dream, such fantasy recuperates and preserves important human values—therefore, it is worth trying to live out. The film's strategy is to transform its basic story with subtle self-reflexiveness and ironically altered fairy-tale elements so that the viewer may several times note with surprise that this movie is no longer what it seemed to be, has subtly shifted tone and resonance to reveal an unexpected narrative, epistemological, and moral sophistication.

The plot at first seems to offer a univocal story about Sybil (played by Ann Zacharias), a 16-year-old virgin (Nea: fem. of neo or new) with a talent for writing romantic, French-style philosophical pornography. Finally discovered by a handsome bookseller/editor (Axel, played by Sami Frey) whose shelves she's been steadily denuding without benefit of payment, she agrees to finish a manuscript that he will publish (for the enhancement of both art and commerce). After a while, Sybil realizes that to get past her writer's block she must make love with a flesh-and-blood man —who but handsome Axel. Despite his initial reluctance, things are wonderful between them, but to protect her anonymity, they agree not to see each other "till the snow melts from the chapel roof." The book becomes a terrific success and Sybil waits for the change of the seasons. Axel, however, does no lonesome pining. When, in her habitual investigative voyeurism, Sybil discovers that he's spreading joy all over Geneva, she becomes enraged and plans a fake rape scene

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to be discovered by her family. The plot works; Axel is disgraced and becomes a fugitive. When he secretly returns for countervengeance, reason, emotion, morality, and biology combine to unite the lovers who, presumably, will get it right from now on.

One of the primary techniques by which this story opens out into its later, surprising richness is a pervasive self-reflexive quality that comments on the creation of both art and individual reality. Sybil lives much of her life through her pornographic imagination, which is both shaped by and shapes her ideas and experiences of sex and love in the real world. In fact, her completion of her "great pornographic masterpiece" leads to a mock ending within the film (marked by the subtitle E.N.D.) that makes you wonder briefly if the inner and outer fictions might be co-terminal. Later, when the family discusses, in Sybil's presence, the huge success of this anonymous novel, the enjoyable dramatic irony of "who knows what about whom" makes us wonder if this is the story of the creation of *The Story of O,* adding another dimension to the self-conscious fiction-making.* Axel, too, has built an elaborate fiction in which he enshrines the memory of the mother who left him in a lace- and mist-shrouded locked chamber with her purple dress spread out on the bed. But Sybil's experiences with Axel both feed and undermine her own romantic fantasy, and it is she, in turn, who reads his mother's diary and later frees him to see his true feelings about the desertion. And in the end it is Sybil's creation of the rape drama that forces Axel into recognizing the emotional choice by which they both should live.

The fairy-tale qualities operating throughout both the narrative and visual dimensions provide another important means by which the film develops toward the resonant moral parable that will be its final identity. A poor little rich girl who seems like a changeling to her relatives, Sybil is trapped in the family home (named Xanadou) by a wicked father and a nasty, conventional sister; but even so, her world is bathed in pink light. She is aided in her early travails only by a familiar familiar—a marvelous cat who makes Piewacket look like a fumbler. This kitty has an unerring erotic instict and purrs heavily when the atmosphere becomes sensual. The film cuts to feline close-ups at a number of significant moments, integrating the cat's image so cleverly that we are convinced of its occult powers and taste for good living. Also possessed of a passion for auto-eroticism, Princess Sybil is actually self-awakened into sexual partnership with the reluctant help of the charming anti-Prince Axel. The encounter frees her literary powers for a supernatural productivity, but the Prince then tries out all the princesses in the kingdom except the right one (her). A little later, the degraded princess sits at water's edge contemplating the swans, whose traditional duty has always been to show us the possibilities of the duckling's future. Finally aided by her golden haired (fairy god-) mother (who has just realized that she, too, is in love—with her silver-clad sister-in-law—and has therefore had her helping powers freed), the witchy Sybil is left with the task of getting things right in the kingdom of personal relations. Aided by a glass (containing a servant-boy's semen) and a wand (consisting of a long-handled spoon), she is able to brew the right potion to make her prince give up his decadence and return to ways of love that are at once ancient and new in their

*Thanks to Bill Moritz for telling me about some further layers of fictionality involved in this film: *Nea* (adapted from the novel by Emanuelle Arson) also evokes the fifties American film, *Concerning a Woman of Sin,* where a girl considerably younger than Nea writes pornography from the stock phrases in books she's been secretly reading. The emphasis is primarily on the problems of preserving anonymity; the girl's own eroticism and love life are not the focus. And this film, in turn, is based on a short story by Ben Hecht, whose daughter played the lead role in the film.

Sisterly love in NEA ▶

recreation. And off they go into the foggiest of lakes on the smallest of boats.

Visually the film maintains its double and triple allegorical resonances through the hazy, filtered images; the strange or beautiful or ludicrous or unidentifiable carvings, fabrics, and other objects in Sybil's "grotto"; the sudden fall of lacy white snow that transforms the park as mother and daughter walk around talking of love between women; the misty glitter of the brass and white bathroom in which the virgin makes her ritual preparation; and, most amazingly, through a series of storybook shots as she and Axel follow the walled road that winds through a Lilliputian landscape. Axel lives in a dark castle that can only be reached by an eerie journey across the lake out of which it seems to be emerging. Throughout both Xanadou and Axel's castle, pillars of fire leap in the grates. (This use of leaping, bright fires to suggest the presence of intense, hot, and potentially dangerous magic forces can be found in several recent films that also combine a fairy tale quality with a subtle ironic comment on present life—Malle's *Black Moon* and Chabrol's *Alice or the Last Escape,* for example.) When the chapel, whose roof has stayed snowy too long, burns down one night, the superimposition of Sybil's watching face on the dancing flames suggests that she might indeed have the witch's traditional power over fire. Sybil's astonishing visual transformations—from ear-flapped, ski-parkaed kid to soft-haired, sloe-eyed seductress, as well as her mother's golden, luscious looks, and Axel's strong, dark handsomeness also suggest that it is surely a magic land where these people live. The father, who has a bad accent to his French anyway, is certainly an evil king, or a congenitally nasty troll of the region who's been further corrupted by money and power.

The self-reflexiveness and ironic fairy-tale transformations deconstruct the plot material and recreate it into a modern moral parable that goes something like this: A healthy, intelligent, rebellious young virgin is full of romantic absolutes about what love will be like. When her time is right, she falls in love and tests out the real thing. She finds it's terrific to love and be loved, and she imagines her lover feels the same way. But he is acting as if the love never happened. He denies her access to his person (she could have had him easily if he didn't love her; practically everyone else can) and prefers a compulsive, controlled sensuality with a series of women, including her sister. She looks everywhere for knowledge, but nothing she learns shakes her belief that love is extremely important in life and must not be compromised. Enraged at Axel's stupid, killing denial, she decides to hold him responsible for having hurt her (and himself) instead of accepting the pain as mature or inevitable. She successfully plots revenge. When he sneaks back to counter-attack her, she tells him that he is a coward and a pig and as they fight, the power of love opens the channels into his being and he understands at last how they must shape their lives.

The scene in which Sybil watches Axel and her sister talk of the now-famous book and then make love illustrates the subtle touch with which the film accomplishes its moral analysis. In perhaps his cruellest betrayal, Axel tells the sister it is *he* who wrote *Nea* and both are turned on by this false claim to fame. What has helped make Axel capable of this act—which makes a lie of creativity in exchange for a fuck he could have gotten anyway—is the very fact that he has defended himself against Sybil by choosing her sister as another amorous partner in passing. If you deny and scorn what is really valuable and what you really need in life, it makes you colder and colder and less able or worthy to have what you need.

The scene that most powerfully (and playfully) balances the elements of fairy tale and parable is the one where, after her father has discovered the "rape," Sybil runs across the fields in her torn little blue robe with the cuts of her self-mutilation glowing dully against the snow. She shouts over and over: "He hurt me! He hurt me! Why did Axel hurt me?" Her words are perfect for the young princess's expression of horror and bewilderment at her violation, but at the same time, in the visual ambiguity of the magic landscape, the repetitive incantation takes on a deep resonance. Eschewing all modern relativism (as she has done throughout), her cries insist that to deny love is to inflict great pain. Such pain is worthy of comfort and redress, and is not to

be suffered silently. And since it is a rape that is supposed to have caused her wounds, there is the further implication that the entry of the man into the woman when he is bent on denying love will cause a pain—a rending or tearing, an intrusion—like rape. But just as Sybil is orchestrating this drama, a new comic scene suddenly appears in the script; she finds herself running wildly into the midst of an astonished wedding crowd outside a mountain chapel. Making a quick estimate of her new, conventional audience, Sybil—that wise little seer—makes perfect use of this new twist in the plot; she gently collapses before them, bleeding quietly onto the pure white snow.

In the successful polyvalance of this sequence, Kaplan shows that the comic imagination (both hers and Sybil's) can reelevate romantic love from a cynically regarded preoccupation of childish women to a moral imperative whose obligations are binding for adults who would live a life of integrity and renewal. However, the affirmation of romantic love is not limited to boy-meets-girl; the mother's sensual romance with her sister-in-law is equally celebrated as a source of regenerative power. Furthermore, Sybil and Axel are reunited, *not* because love is somehow inevitable in the human condition, but because it is a project of Sybil's; it is brought about by her belief and the actions she takes. The playful manipulations of fictionality become for the audience what creative artifice has been for Sybil and Axel—a means of recovering, by choice and with new freedom born of an ironic perspective, a valuable element of female (and male) experience.

—BEVERLE HOUSTON

MEXICO, MEXICO, RA, RA, RA

Directed by Gustavo Alatriste.

"Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra"—a hollow chant, like the bugle sounding "charge!" at an American sports event, made up more of bravado than of conviction. It's a symbolic yell, like those from the sports fields, which gathers strength from the masses, shoring up an emotional bond behind a

NEA

common—most often forgettable—cause. It's an almost mindless tribal shout of loyalty, an automatic declaration of unquestioned allegiance. It's a rallying cry, unremembered after the stadium lights have cooled.

Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra, one of the fiercest Mexican films in years, begins with short scenes interspersed by a blank screen with the title yell on the sound track. These scenes depict one of the characters, a poor, middle-aged man in Mexico City, lying in a park, cursing at the passing cars, or else pissing on expressway traffic from an overpass. Later, he returns home—home being two small rooms, one above the other—and tries to get some sleep in the attic bedroom. The room is teeming with children (he has 14), near and distant relatives, and an assortment of spongers. There is an unforgettable shot taken of this group from directly above which makes them appear to be a swarm, a field of larvae just coming to life.

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be suffered silently. And since it is a rape that is supposed to have caused her wounds, there is the further implication that the entry of the man into the woman when he is bent on denying love will cause a pain—a rending or tearing, an intrusion—like rape. But just as Sybil is orchestrating this drama, a new comic scene suddenly appears in the script; she finds herself running wildly into the midst of an astonished wedding crowd outside a mountain chapel. Making a quick estimate of her new, conventional audience, Sybil—that wise little seer—makes perfect use of this new twist in the plot; she gently collapses before them, bleeding quietly onto the pure white snow.

In the successful polyvalance of this sequence, Kaplan shows that the comic imagination (both hers and Sybil's) can reelevate romantic love from a cynically regarded preoccupation of childish women to a moral imperative whose obligations are binding for adults who would live a life of integrity and renewal. However, the affirmation of romantic love is not limited to boy-meets-girl; the mother's sensual romance with her sister-in-law is equally celebrated as a source of regenerative power. Furthermore, Sybil and Axel are reunited, *not* because love is somehow inevitable in the human condition, but because it is a project of Sybil's; it is brought about by her belief and the actions she takes. The playful manipulations of fictionality become for the audience what creative artifice has been for Sybil and Axel—a means of recovering, by choice and with new freedom born of an ironic perspective, a valuable element of female (and male) experience.

—BEVERLE HOUSTON

MEXICO, MEXICO, RA, RA, RA

Directed by Gustavo Alatriste.

"Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra"—a hollow chant, like the bugle sounding "charge!" at an American sports event, made up more of bravado than of conviction. It's a symbolic yell, like those from the sports fields, which gathers strength from the masses, shoring up an emotional bond behind a

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common—most often forgettable—cause. It's an almost mindless tribal shout of loyalty, an automatic declaration of unquestioned allegiance. It's a rallying cry, unremembered after the stadium lights have cooled.

Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra, one of the fiercest Mexican films in years, begins with short scenes interspersed by a blank screen with the title yell on the sound track. These scenes depict one of the characters, a poor, middle-aged man in Mexico City, lying in a park, cursing at the passing cars, or else pissing on expressway traffic from an overpass. Later, he returns home—home being two small rooms, one above the other—and tries to get some sleep in the attic bedroom. The room is teeming with children (he has 14), near and distant relatives, and an assortment of spongers. There is an unforgettable shot taken of this group from directly above which makes them appear to be a swarm, a field of larvae just coming to life.

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Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra, through a series of linked vignettes, paints a picture of Mexico at all social levels—and damns them all. It finds the country to be populated by swindlers and chiselers, cheaters and crooks, lazies and opportunists.

The rich escape problems by privilege. For the poor, survival is salesmanship. They either sell themselves (in one episode, a woman, arrested for shoplifting, sleeps with a policeman and is released) or their property (a poor man, through a political favor, gets his family into a government housing project, then immediately proceeds to sell the plumbing fixtures) or even, their name (a man marries a pregnant girl, and after the wedding night, goes home to his first family—another pregnant wife and five children). For the middle class, it's all a matter of clinging on to what they have (a bureaucrat procures a woman for his boss for an evening—his wife).

Curiously, the film has a light touch. Despite its very blunt language and its bleak attitude, it manages to be funny. A biting social satire, *Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra* finds human folly uncontrollably funny. The man across the aisle from me, sipping a beer from a six-pack he sneaked into the theater, laughed uproariously throughout the film.

But it's a laughter that produces its own hangover. Singly, the scenes go down easily enough, but they have a brutal additive power. As the episodes go by, the humor begins to pale, the comedy loses the first innocence of intoxication, and the headache—the social reality—won't go away. We begin wanting the film to stop, we've had enough, but it goes on, making its point, again and again.

Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra is a bold, frontal attack on Mexico's *status quo,* directly addressed to Mexico. As self-criticism is seldom popular, director Gustavo Alatriste cleverly uses humor to draw the audience in, then refuses to let go while he pounds his message home. Like all satirists, Alatriste is a moralist and a reformer; but he's also an optimist. He is deeply troubled about Mexico, but doesn't despair; he's hopeful that there can be change. And it's promising that such an honest statement could get made at all.

Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra is a satirical polemic, and Alatriste, a smart polemicist, doesn't want to take the chance that he won't be understood. Just to make sure the point is clear, in an epilogue Alatriste has one of the actors, an officious-looking type who played a government secretary, deliver a speech directly into the camera.

"The worst of all," he says, "is not the corruption that drowns us nor the ignorance that weakens us, the worst of all is that we don't want to learn . . . an ignorant country is an indefensible one. Mexico is a country on its knees which has never wanted to stand up . . . Enough of demagoguery! What we don't do for ourselves will go undone. If the country refuses to learn, Mexico will continue being 'Mexico, Mexico, Ra, Ra, Ra.'"

The film ends, but the speech is repeated again over the final credits. It's not funny anymore. The man across the aisle, beer can in hand, stopped laughing. —CHARLES BERG

CANOA

Directed by Felipe Cazals. Screenplay by Tomas Perez Turrent.

Canoa depicts the horror of mob violence as it has never been shown on the screen before. Based on an actual incident, the film begins tranquilly and builds, like the seething agitation of a crowd gone berserk, to the final terror of its climax. It is an unremittingly disturbing movie, perhaps most easily compared to recent violent American films such as *Rolling Thunder* and *Taxi Driver.* But those films were fictions, made-up stories, and we could comfort ourselves with that knowledge. *Canoa,* on the other hand, gets its force and validity directly from fact.

The movie follows five Mexican young men, workers at a university, who decide to make a camping trip to the mountains near the small town of San Miguel de Canoa in the state of Puebla, Mexico. The time is October, 1968. There is political unrest in Mexico; student uprisings come embarrassingly at the same time as the Mexican Olympiad. San Miguel de Canoa is ruled by a priest who drums the evils of communism into his flock. Because of the unrest in the country, the village is in a virtual state of martial law. Armed men guard the church.

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The five young men find themselves in the town at nightfall. Unaware of the near-frenzied state of the villagers, they are divided as to whether they should continue their journey or spend the night in the town. It begins to rain; they decide to stay.

But the villagers, fearful of any and all strangers, are unwilling to put them up for the night. As the five go from place to place seeking lodging, the word spreads among the villagers that the five are communist students who have come to disrupt the town. The priest refuses to put them up. Finally, they find a place to stay with a peasant and his family. This man, it turns out, has not let himself be dominated by the priest. When the townspeople find out that the five are staying at the home of a known local dissenter, they suspect the worst kind of subversion. They gather into a mob and, with the consent of the priest, capture the young men. They will make an example of them for others who might want to bring their communist ideas to San Miguel de Canoa. The peasant is killed. The five are tortured and dragged through the streets; two of them die. The remaining three are saved only by the intervention of the federal police. The film ends with the facts of the matter being hushed up. A postscript rolls on the screen telling us that no one was ultimately brought to account for the three murders.

Canoa joins the best tradition of films on mob violence: Fritz Lang's *Fury,* William Wellman's *The Ox-Bow Incident,* Joseph Mankiewicz's *No Way Out.* And yet *Canoa* stands distinctly apart. Its power derives from its ability to be historically accurate and graphically realistic. It is based on an actual occurrence and was filmed in many of the same locations. The story is told in a quasi-documentary style, a narrative device that gives the impression of sticking close to the facts. The violence shown is unyielding. The makers realized that to spare us the scenes of detailed violence would be to gloss over the real horror of the events. The violence is graphic and it needed to be. For the makers to have taken a more pleasant way out would have been a cheat on their theme. The idea is to show the absolute terror of violence in an attempt to turn people away from it. *Canoa* is one film that cannot be charged with gratuitous violence.

The young campers denied lodging in the Canoa church.

But the touch of brilliance in this film is the introduction of a character in the village who speaks directly into the camera. He speaks to us as a sort of village consciousness, a witness willing to talk. This Brechtian device works exactly in the way Bertolt Brecht theorized it would. It calls attention to itself, breaking down the audience's emotional involvement with the gruesome spectacle so that their attention would instead turn to the true problem. Mob violence *is* emotional, *is* irrational. To get us to understand that as we are watching it, the film-makers had to pull us away from time to time so that we could consider the bloody acts unemotionally, rationally, coldly, intellectually, empirically. The function of the character who talks to us is to give us time to consider precisely what is going on. It's uncomfortable, for we'd just as soon *not* stop to think about it. But by stopping, by forcing us to look at it, the film-makers are hoping to teach us a stern lesson.

The witness's ironic tone implies that there was more that happened in San Miguel de Canoa on that night in October than anyone could ever understand after the fact. After such a flash-point event this is nearly always so; but what we do manage to understand is enough: that ignorance, fear, and hatred can all too easily ignite into extreme violence.

In a final sequence, the witness is seen approaching the camera, us. When he sees the camera, he turns and tries to avoid it by going another way, only to be met by another camera. Trapped, he resigns himself to talk to us. We

wonder: has anything been learned? Has anything changed? His last words ring in our ears: "*Estabamos mal . . . 'stamos peor!*" ("We were bad off before . . . now we're worse!")

The film was made in secrecy and it is a triumph that is was completed at all since many of the emotional wounds—for survivors and villagers—must still be tender. *Canoa* won the Silver Bear Award (Second Place) at the Berlin Film Festival; it is a credit to Mexican film making.

—CHARLES BERG

PARATROOPERS

This autumn the London Film Festival took one of its perennial courageous steps in presenting the première, in the English-speaking world, of Dr. Yehuda Ne'eman's film *Paratroopers,* a controversial film about army life in Israel, the distribution of which the Israeli army has tried to prevent, and which has caused much raising of eyebrows and complaining pens within the Jewish communities of Holland and France, where the film was seen recently on television and by chosen audiences.

The fact is that *Paratroopers,* while honestly reflecting elements of Israeli life, is completely atypical for Israeli cinema and thus underlines the conclusion that Israeli cinema does not reflect Israeli life. This perhaps understandable phenomenon in a country beset by problems was made abundantly clear to me recently when, on the occasion of research for a documentary on Israeli media, I had the opportunity to see some 40 features made over the past 10 years in Israel and found that not one dealt with borders, very few dealt with war, and only one dealt with Arabs.

To make films in a country of less than 3½ million inhabitants and to expect them to pay for themselves obviously implies concessions to popular taste; to make them, in addition, in a language which is spoken nowhere else, thus making their export virtually impossible, borders on heroism. Of course, heroism is what Israelis claim their country is all about, but this particular cinematographic brand, judging by the results, would be better defined as stubbornness. Brawn, it would seem, may unfortunately work in today's politics, but its art yield is negligible.

Conditions are not exactly favorable. The lowest-common-denominator themes and style needed to attract the totality of Israel's potential of 800,000 moviegoers (even that is an unusually high percentage of population and Israel is lucky to be one of the few remaining countries with social cinemagoing habits) conflict sharply with the type of contents and form needed to make films for export. The economics are of the razor's-edge, risky type: if less than one-half million people see a film, it loses money, and the profit to be garnered from the remaining 300,000, even if they all buy the rigidly price-controlled tickets, is £50,000 tops.

Hebrew was only reinvented at the turn of the century, and of course not all of Israel's new citizens speak it. Israelis live dangerously and do not necessarily want to see their problems repeated on the screen, whereas world moviegoers seek to receive, from Israeli films, clarification concerning precisely the things Israelis are tired of. Thus most of the few serious Israeli films that have made any kind of headway abroad have been failures in Israel. Israeli reality, the one sure thing to interest us on the outside, is the one topic Israeli films practically exclude.

I am compelled to say "practically," because the everyday does appear on the screen, and provides, in fact, the point of departure for most film stories. But out of ten films made here in a year, eight are so-called "burekkas" (otherwise the name of a popular, most unappetizing oriental sweet)—gooey comedies laced with an Eastern sense of tragicomic exaggeration, to which the application of the term "realism" would have to be considered pure insult. Army service, for example, to which every Israeli male is subject for a month every year and which includes compulsory service for women, has only ever been the subject of comedy.

The predicaments are quantitative and sociological, and other countries suffer them, if not in the same measure and abruptness. Founded by an idealistic, Western, intellectual elite of pioneers but today overrun by an underdeveloped, Third-World immigrant population that amounts to more than 65% of the total, Israel has developed a class stratification which is not only economic but cultural. Until recently, belligerent external pressures have fused differences, but as native-born generations assume autonomy and power the fis-

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sure lines expand.

"We have never been allowed to forget the Holocaust"—says Dr. Ne'eman—"that holy cow of our education, nor our Jewishness, traditions, aggressions justified by victimization, and all those values by which even today the ruling establishment controls public opinion in Israel." Ne'eman, whose second film this is, was himself a paratrooper and physician before coming to what he calls alpinism ("wanting to make movies in Israel is like climbing walls"), and he is one of the central movers in a group of dedicated young Israelis calling themselves "Kayitz," which in Hebrew means summer, but consists of the letters which make up, as an abbreviation, the translation of "Young Israeli Cinema." His film may be considered the first to have come from the ranks of the growing opposition, from that political direction to which many army veterans belong, which is beginning to call for reassessment.

Paratroopers is more than a political critique. Situated in its entirety in the milieu of soldiers in training, it is first and foremost a much-needed, realistic window upon the breeding ground of a stratum of Israeli society that makes up something like 60% of the population: those who are, or have been, soldiers. It is also in the best tradition of army films, almost classic to the point of banality but cleverly skirting the commonplace: a fast, dusty, noisy and rambunctious description of the solider's day. Not until mid-picture do we realize that the foundations are being laid for analysis and criticism.

Two stories intersect: that of a harassed recruit who in a moment of exasperation jumps, too fast, after a handgrenade he's been forced to throw into an abandoned Arab house, and dies, and that of the officer who made him do it, a career soldier, young, good-looking, a lady-killer and disciplinarian. Court-martialled and acquitted, the officer is given the chance to leave the army, at least for a time, but cannot resist the temptation to stay on, to take on new recruits, sweat, authority, and the benefits of unequivocal values.

Where at first the viewer fears that this is going to be just another misunderstood-poetic-soul war movie, we slowly but penetratingly realize that the recruit plays a secondary role only, kin to Lea Massari's in Antonioni's *L'Avventura,* disappearing in mid-story, which, unfolding its inner layers, reveals a nation's obsession with soldiery. The "action" of the film proceeds at a slow rate and is secondary to the symbolic meaning of the events shown. As the recruit is set upon by his peers and superiors, it appears at first that the rough handling that he suffers does bring out some sort of basic strength in him. He refuses to meet his parents who come to see him at the training camp and will not give away the names of companions who have maltreated him. But his physical prowess is not at the level of his psychological readiness: his ability to deliver what he himself would like to is limited, and the break, in mid-film, comes with such sudden effect, that the question "suicide or accident" is effectively left open, since we almost cannot conceive of so quick an apocalypse.

Recruit tied to stretcher for disobeying commanding officer: PARATROOPERS

All the more *Rashomon*-like is the dénouement of the relationship to the superior. The version of the viewer (compassion for the recruit, based on the identification element heretofore maintained) is contrasted with the version of the military authorities, who at first seem to be treating the matter fairly. In fact, this fairness is never put to the question, but what is exposed is the infrastructure of the mentalities involved, whereby the good of the threatened community is a paramount factor and thus everything in its service becomes justifiable. The strength of the director's way of slowly showing this mechanism lies in the refusal to point a finger and to name the evil. The love element (the officer is shown involved in a modern, free relationship to rather a lovely and poetic girl, who silently dreams that he will free himself of the soldiering dimension) further helps to show the simplicity of the values taken for granted by the young in Israel.

As cinema, Ne'eman's work is competent and free-flowing, and many have minded the slow exposition, but to me the impact of the change in the middle would be lessened by a more traditional first act-second act buildup. In the meticulous, dreary, upward slope of army camp depiction a first cinema image is created of Israeli values and attitudes. The language is dirty, the songs scatological and erotic, and pranks juvenile. And since no war is shown but only maneuvers, the whole heroism syndrome is bracketed out. It is a film about fucking and shitting and throwing grenades, not about saving the fatherland. Its force lies in showing how the first become paramount and the last accidental. In this sense, it is timeless.

—GIDEON BACHMANN

HEART OF GLASS

A film by Werner Herzog.

The film perplexes the reviewer. Its bizarre, sometimes discontinuous, often unmotivated events beg for exposition, but the emotionality in *Heart of Glass* rests curiously uncentered in plot. Story told, the film remains disconcertingly "about" something else.

An early nineteenth-century Bavarian village, supported by a glass-blowing factory, loses its secret for ruby glass, which dies with a workman. The invalid factory owner is sporadically demented. His son (Stefan Guettler) becomes obsessed with rediscovering the secret of the ruby glass. Most often viewed in their tavern, the townspeople speak and act like sleepwalkers. Never one for half measures, Herzog literally hypnotized the actors to accomplish his end. This effect serves two functions. Leaden, somnambulant movement suggests automatized, industrial workers operating day and night in benumbed acquiescence. Perhaps at odds with this intention is an equal sense that the townspeople speak from a kind of primal superstition and brutality.

Developed in a servant girl's monologue, one image (*Heart of Glass* derives from a novel by Herbert Achternbusch) projects a town made from glass, cold, precisely designed, and deserted. ("There is a church, but no people are in it.") Another notion, stemming from the son's ruminations, suggests that the ruby glass contains the life, the blood, the heart of the village. Is the blood the workers', a metaphor of encroaching, parasitic urban civilization? Or is it an age-old, rural secret of life whose displacement endangers the survival of everyone?

Hias (Josef Bierbichler), who keeps an eye on the cattle in the countryside, envisions future events. ("I don't care whether you believe me. I just tell what I see. I don't know if it's true.") He foresees imminent destruction for the factory, the death of a workman, and eventually the leveling of the town itself.

Herzog's opening sequence finds Hias alone on a hillside, "seeing" the end of the world. Time crumbles and the earth falls apart. In his vision, Hias descends deep into the bowels of chaos, then rises high above the bubbling surface. What sounds prosaically like murky doomsday is visibly intensified by a bucolic, hue-flattening fog that melds the rural blues and greens, and by Hias's primitive closeness to the nearby cattle. Less corrupted, in contrast to the other peasants, Hias dreams instead of blindly groping in brutish slumber.

The villagers are superstitious, coarse, grotesque, and cruel. A peasant kills his friend, as Hias predicted, by "falling on him." The next evening, out of loneliness, he carries the corpse to the tavern and dances with it. Guettler murders Ludmilla, the servant girl, in a mad attempt to join her blood with the known constituents of the ruby glass. Forced by the drunken clientele, the dumb wife of the dead man who held the secret, silently disrobes and shuffles on a tabletop to amuse men. Her clumsy, circling gait, not unlike the waddle of a goose she carries, betrays no sign of embarrassment but only resignation.

Hias's futures include World War II and its aftermath, voiced in the language of his time. A stern leader will come. A great bird will drop its eggs on a city with a tower. Herzog's apocalyptic vision intends contemporary relevance, guised, like *The Mystery of Kasper Hauser,* in an early setting whose fictive mode weights allegory with a ballast of movie naturalism.

Maddened by his act of murder, Guettler sets fire to the factory. Accused by the townspeople

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Developed in a servant girl's monologue, one image (*Heart of Glass* derives from a novel by Herbert Achternbusch) projects a town made from glass, cold, precisely designed, and deserted. ("There is a church, but no people are in it.") Another notion, stemming from the son's ruminations, suggests that the ruby glass contains the life, the blood, the heart of the village. Is the blood the workers', a metaphor of encroaching, parasitic urban civilization? Or is it an age-old, rural secret of life whose displacement endangers the survival of everyone?

Hias (Josef Bierbichler), who keeps an eye on the cattle in the countryside, envisions future events. ("I don't care whether you believe me. I just tell what I see. I don't know if it's true.") He foresees imminent destruction for the factory, the death of a workman, and eventually the leveling of the town itself.

Herzog's opening sequence finds Hias alone on a hillside, "seeing" the end of the world. Time crumbles and the earth falls apart. In his vision, Hias descends deep into the bowels of chaos, then rises high above the bubbling surface. What sounds prosaically like murky doomsday is visibly intensified by a bucolic, hue-flattening fog that melds the rural blues and greens, and by Hias's primitive closeness to the nearby cattle. Less corrupted, in contrast to the other peasants, Hias dreams instead of blindly groping in brutish slumber.

The villagers are superstitious, coarse, grotesque, and cruel. A peasant kills his friend, as Hias predicted, by "falling on him." The next evening, out of loneliness, he carries the corpse to the tavern and dances with it. Guettler murders Ludmilla, the servant girl, in a mad attempt to join her blood with the known constituents of the ruby glass. Forced by the drunken clientele, the dumb wife of the dead man who held the secret, silently disrobes and shuffles on a tabletop to amuse men. Her clumsy, circling gait, not unlike the waddle of a goose she carries, betrays no sign of embarrassment but only resignation.

Hias's futures include World War II and its aftermath, voiced in the language of his time. A stern leader will come. A great bird will drop its eggs on a city with a tower. Herzog's apocalyptic vision intends contemporary relevance, guised, like *The Mystery of Kasper Hauser,* in an early setting whose fictive mode weights allegory with a ballast of movie naturalism.

Maddened by his act of murder, Guettler sets fire to the factory. Accused by the townspeople

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of "causing" the event by predicting it, Hias is set upon. Both men are imprisoned. Released, Hias returns to his countryside, there to fight a great bear (which is invisible to the audience) and settle into his final vision. An invisible enemy that can be bested fails quite to evoke the customary Herzog reading of Übermenschen striving condemned to human failures. Perhaps in consequence, Hiaas finally sits alone at a campfire and reports a future time when roosters crow in the forest but no people live there. Then his premonitions spell out an epilogue. Four inhabitants of a deserted island, isolated from all society, set out in an undersized rowboat to discover whether they will, as suspected, fall off the edge of the world. The fact that gulls follow their craft is considered a positive omen.

In a kind of Nietzschean reading of Immanuel Kant, reality for Herzog resides in the imagination and in illusion; the tangible proves to be ultimately illusory. Superhuman vision, then, serves as man's bridge into actuality, into self-realization. At the same time, society's proscribing rubrics condemn such visions to madness, ineffectuality, and self-immolation.

The photography of Jorg Schmidt-Reitwein evokes *Barry Lyndon* in its employment of natural candlelight. The film's conclusion recalls *Aguirre, Wrath of God* with majestic, aerial swirls high above the island. Most especially, music underscores the tension between heroism and the madness of doomed gestures, an act akin to transposing God's message to Faust, *wer immer streibt,* into the theater of the absurd. Using early instruments to perform original compositions, the music derives from Studio für Frühe Musik and Popel Vuh. It lends a kind of eerie, dissonant grandiosity to the movie's final moments.

If failure characterizes all heroic ventures, it is a failure bred of manic defiance (*Even the Dwarfs Started Small*) and innocence (*Stroszek*) cast in an environment (*Fata Morgana)* often more supportive of reptilian than human habitation. Threatened by volcanic eruption, the old man who will not leave his home in *La Soufrière* epitomizes the director's protagonists. Yet we never altogether escape a lurking suspicion of disappointment on Herzog's part that the mountain did not explode. Given the further evidence of *Aguirre,* we become inclined to join the director's equation of irrational, i.e. "mad," visions with his own film-making projects.

—JOHN L. FELL

REMEMBER MY NAME

Director: Alan Rudolph. Script: Rudolph. Photography: Tak Fujimoto. Music: Alberta Hunter. Lagoon Films.

Alan Rudolph's second film was financed by Columbia, then written off as a disaster before it was released, but it has been running successfully in Paris for months and opens shortly in New York. It strikes me as the most exciting Hollywood fantasy to come along in quite some time. Admittedly, I am a Rivette enthusiast; I am fascinated by narrative suspension and indeterminacy, and tend to lose interest when a plot is laid out in full view, because I've usually seen it before. *Remember My Name* deliberately suspends narrative clarity for the better part of its running time, and never entirely eliminates the ambiguities that keep it alive and unpredictable—even though its themes, thanks to Alberta Hunter's offscreen blues songs, are never really in question. It will only confound spectators and critics who perceive movies chiefly through their plots.

A simple look at Rudolph's plot shows it to be as sketchy, in narrative terms, as the blues written and sung by Hunter—and no less expedient or suggestive for his own purpose, which is to do a concerto for Geraldine Chaplin. Rudolph has said that he wanted to do "an update on the themes of the classic woman's melodramas of the Bette Davis, Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford era"; one could also cite the Warner Brothers social protest films of the thirties as a useful reference point. Either way, the aim clearly isn't to imitate the models or criticize them à la *Movie Movie,* but to use them the way a jazz musician uses chord changes—as a launching pad, not a destination.

Newly emerged from twelve years in prison, Emily (Chaplin) drives into a town where Neil (Anthony Perkins) works as a hardhat, and starts bugging both him and his wife Barbara (Barry Berenson) for mysterious reasons: calling their

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home and then hanging up, driving past Neil on a construction job, yanking flowers out of their garden, and entering the house when Neil's away to explore the rooms and confront Barbara in the kitchen (asking her, "Are you a good fuck?" and remarking that she met Neil "in the back of a crowded car" when he was twelve years old).

Meanwhile, Emily starts sleeping with her black landlord, Pike (Moses Gunn), in exchange for some domestic furnishings. Alone in her room, she rehearses a speech to Neil ("I didn't cry when you disappeared . . .") She argues her way into a job in a Thrifty Mart, incurs the enmity of Rita (Alfre Woodward), a black co-worker, assaults her, and stabs Rita's boyfriend with a pencil when he comes on to her. Barbara, who witnesses this event by chance, has Emily arrested for smashing her window, forcing a confrontation between Neil and the two women in turn. Emily sees Neil at the police station and finally delivers her speech about her emotional and sexual obsession with him "over the past 4,380 days." Neil convinces Barbara to drop charges, then confesses that he was once married to Emily, who went to prison for running over a woman he was having an affair with.

Appalled by this information, Barbara leaves him. Neil gets fired, phones Emily, meets her in a bar, gets drunk, and lets her make love to him. In the morning, Emily swipes his credit card to buy a new wardrobe before driving away, leaving Neil to face a resentful Pike.

The flimsiness and banality of such a fictional world—which asks us to accept Perkins as a shifty, no-account hardhat, and Chaplin as a rough equivalent to Toshiro Mifune in *Yojimbo*—is readily apparent. Rudolph uses a form of narrative striptease to keep his plot suspenseful, but this turns out to be partially a ruse; a fully legible and comprehensive fictional world isn't what he's after, as we see for example from the fact that he never definitively clarifies whether or not Emily steals money from the Thrifty Mart cash register.

Indeed, Emily's "sincerity" is an ambiguous issue on one level or another in virtually every scene. No less duplicitous, ambivalent and opaque than Ophuls's Madame de . . . , she literally makes herself up as she goes, and the only proper way to respond to this challenge is to improvise along with her, assigning her a set of ephemeral, almost discontinuous identities while being strung along on Rudolph's narrative and stylistic continuities. Thus while narrative exposition (including Emily's separate actions), matching camera movements and repeated blues motifs, both singly and in concert, imply an unwavering singleness of purpose, the actual *performance* of Emily (and of Chaplin) proceeds like a series of bold experimental forays and flourishes around this obsession, a virtuoso "solo" that swirls through diverse possibilities while hitting all the octaves.

If one could take Emily apart the way Bulle Ogier takes apart the Russian doll in *L'Amour fou,* one might find only a succession of deceptive layers stripped away to reveal a void—an empty center that the rest of the film defines. But in fact, the rest of the film asks us to put her together, out of the same fragments of her past that she is struggling to free herself from, so that we "fully" grasp her social identity at the same point that she puts it behind her—abandoning us along with Neil and Pike to make a fresh start.

Before this happens, she's an outcast shopping for an identity, trying on everything that could conceivably fit. Her first and last stop in town in this very symmetrically designed movie is significantly at a clothes store, where she stakes out a wardrobe like a samurai choosing weapons. (This proves to be all that she needs; driving past a familiar poster—"Use a gun/Go to prison/ That's the law"—she can only smile.) Sufficiently armed, she stalks through the remainder of the film with as much pizzazz as any Norman Mailer hero, using her eccentricities largely as diversions to throw her victims off balance.

Consider her approach to a recalcitrant Pike when she wants window drapes and clean sheets for her room. "*I* know what you want, you want me to beg for favors—okay, I'll beg." She gets down on her knees in an abject parody of begging, hands outstretched: "Clean sheets? Clean sheets? Gimme clean sheets—drapes for my windows . . ." Then she suddenly, violently leaps to her feet and cries, *"Don't you dare kiss me!"*, slaps him, and falls into his arms, disarming him completely. "Takes a woman to take a man outa

himself," he mutters bemusedly—incidentally suggesting why *Remember My Name* qualifies as a male fantasy more than a feminist tract. Then, to save himself a bit of honor, he adds: "But to do that she's gotta be better than him."

And she is: not only with Pike, but with every other man (and woman) she encounters, each of whom is gradually dismantled by her arsenal of discontinuous, seemingly contradictory moves. The psychological logic of this strategy is that her past and her obsession are wholly matters of monotony and stasis—as fixed and rigid, in a way, as the traditional blues forms used by Hunter. And the only way that she (or we) can work through this limitation is to improvise on the given chords—assuming diverse roles and stances in relation to the action while forging ahead in the existential present.

This is the first time I've ever wholly accepted Geraldine Chaplin in an American film—perhaps because it's the first American film that's been built around her unusual and inventive mannerist talents. Her role as Opal, the obnoxious groupie in *Nashville,* was obviously central to Altman's conception, and was reportedly conceived of as a parody of his own role as director; yet his failure to develop this role beyond satirical platitudes while continuing to use her as an identification point for the spectator eventually revealed a certain hollowness at the center of that conception. (The part was distorted, too, in the final editing, leaving one with the impression that Opal was really supposed to be a BBC correspondent, not just a pathetic fraud pretending to be one.)

Annie Oakley in *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* offered Chaplin a more nuanced role and yielded a much subtler performance, but this wound up getting buried under the braggadocio of the male hamming that ultimately swamped the film. And as the reception co-ordinator in *A Wedding,* she was handed another satirical cutout like Opal to mimic.

It was Rudolph's first (and previous) feature, *Welcome to LA,* that probably gave Chaplin her first real chance to show her wares in an American context. (I'm unfamiliar with most of her work for her husband Carlos Saura, and have only the dimmest recollection of *Dr. Zhivago*;

REMEMBER MY NAME: *Geraldine Chaplin*

but in Rivette's still unreleased *Noroît,* where she plays a solitary avenging pirate—clearly anticipating her avenging ex-con in *Remember My Name*—her capacities as a mime, often evocative of her father's, are allowed to function powerfully in a completely nonrealistic mode.) What she lacked was a strong enough conception to "place" her eccentric character and performance in a particular context. Richard Baskin's narcissistically self-pitying and droning songs—establishing a thematic center that her secondary role was supposed to help illustrate—projected a charming (if unlikely) sort of self-conviction, but not enough to support and enhance a major performance. This is what the firmer and tighter strategies of *Remember My Name* generously provide.

Some residue of Robert Altman's influence in a few off-center gags and motifs—a loony customer at the Thrifty Mart; several TV news reports about a catastrophic earthquake in Budapest (which everyone ignores); a thematic preoccupation with dwelling units and locks—shouldn't disguise the fact that Rudolph develops a much stronger independence from his producer's style here than in *Welcome.* The audacity of teaming Chaplin with a black octogenarian blues singer in an audiovisual "duet" implies a stylistic discipline and concentration that is not apparent in Altman's other recent productions, where notational gags and details claim most of the space—crowding out the possibility of the kind of "star" performance that Chaplin gives here. Settling on a tight yet relaxed frame-

work where the anger and passion of a wounded outsider can define its own awesome limits, Rudolph allows both women to wail, and the results are spellbinding.

—JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

LAST CHANTS FOR A SLOW DANCE (DEAD END)

Directed, produced, photographed, and edited by Jon Jost. Written by Jost with Peter Tries. Available from: Watershed Films, Box 315, Franklin Lake, NJ 07417.

Jon Jost, who made *Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End)* for less than $3000, must be among the most independent, least commercial filmmakers in the contemporary cinema. Given the size of his working budgets, it is not surprising that he makes extensive use of long, single-take sequences. But while it is clear that *Last Chants* could not have been made so cheaply without its long takes, unbroken views of sustained chunks of action are so fundamental to Jost's narrative/psychological sense that it is difficult to imagine him working without them. Indeed, so deep is Jost's commitment to the long take that, at two points in *Last Chants,* he seems on the verge of redefining its narrative possibilities by compressing more of first a marriage and then a one-night stand into a single take than could logically happen within the temporal space of a single shot.

Formal innovations aside, *Last Chants,* which begins and ends with its male hero behind the wheel of his pickup truck, has generic roots among the bleaker Hollywood "road films." (The spiritual kinship with Ulmer's *film maudit, Detour,* is particularly striking.) For an hour-and-a-half of screen time, quintessential loser Tom Bates wanders through a series of futile, meaningless, generally hostile encounters before arriving at what the film's final title aptly identifies as a "Dead End."

Last Chants opens with a disembodied voice, (Bates's, it turns out), delivering a long monologue /harangue, apparently to the passing countryside, about travel, despair, and the impossibility of finding a good job or a good woman. Occasionally, the man punctuates his comments with giddy, almost demented laughter that helps identify him as someone who has been on the road too long and knows it and is anxious to get home. The sequence ends with a dramatic long take, the camera mounted on the front of the truck and looking into the cab, first at the man, then, surprisingly, revealing a silent passenger seated next to him—thereby defining Bates irrevocably as someone whose aloneness does not depend on the absence of other people. Further, here, as elsewhere, Bates's conversations are not so much dialogues as alternating monologues of varying lengths, characterized by persistent misunderstanding between speaker and listener. In this sequence, Bates draws his passenger into the conversation by asserting that "all women are pussy," and then adding "You got a girl? She's pussy, too." When the rider takes exception to this comment—"I don't think of her that way"—the disconnection between the two men becomes almost tangible. Shortly later, when the rider suggests that Bates may be crazy, there is a silence that seems to last much longer than it does. Finally, Bates pulls his truck over and orders the rider out. What is most significant is the fact that Bates has here evidently been trying to be friendly, or at least congenial, but, by the conclusion of the sequence the screen has become charged with hostility, giving Bates an aura of latent menace that only comes to fruition much later in the film.

The balance of *Last Chants* plays variations on this theme of interpersonal disconnectedness. After a disorienting reunion, full of jarring cuts, Bates and his wife make love; as they do so, to the strains of a country and western song, the screen goes dark, not so much from discretion as to register the lack of feeling in the act. Immediately afterwards, the couple have a cold, almost theatrically bitter confrontation, shot in single take, that in tone and visual style seems almost Fassbinderish. The wife stands in front of a mirror putting on make-up, showing only the reflection of her face to Bates and the camera. Most of the time Bates's face, too, is shown through the mirror, his reflection pinned in the frame between his wife's reflection to his left and the back of her head in the foreground, just to his right. This visual confinement is only equivocally relieved by pans to direct shots of Bates in the back of the room, his face profiled/surrounded by the darkness of the next room. He is conspicuously uncomfortable through

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the scene, edgy, poised for flight; at one point he actually starts to walk away into the darkness. Thus the woman has mastery of space—constricting her husband's head—and of action—she is putting on make-up, while he is merely standing. Jessica St. John plays Darlene with a self-righteous theatricality that seems, particularly in the context of the naturalness of the rest of the cast, jarring and slightly out-of-place. But what becomes clear through the scene is that it is the character, not the actress who is giving the performance, continually keeping her husband on the defensive by enumerating, almost point-by-point, all his failings. When she finally does turn away from the mirror to face Bates directly, it is to announce that she is pregnant with a third child; since he had not wanted even the first two, the directness of her gaze seems as much an act of aggression as of forthrightness; it plays like the carefully orchestrated delivery of an emotional punchline. The scene ends with her facing him again as she tauntingly asks "What're you gonna do now?" Her smug anger contrasts with his tentative, uncomfortable manner, his inability here, as elsewhere, to articulate his needs or feelings beyond the level of "I didn't come home for *this*."

One of the more striking things about the exchange is the way that, even allowing for the six-week separation the couple has just passed through, an unnatural amount seems to happen within the space of a single shot. Specifically, the wife's moods, and her line of attack, seem to shift with a frequency that is not entirely plausible, even as part of a performance. Because the shot itself lasts so long, the harangue gradually comes to seem endless, to the viewer as much as to Bates; we want the sequence to be over nearly as much, and feel nearly as trapped within it, as he does. This temporal claustrophobia complements the visual and behavioral suggestions of Bates's disorientation, his sense of being pressed within the contours of a world where even time distorts events into hostile shapes.

A more graphic sense of things happening too quickly develops within a subsequent shot that encompasses virtually the entire duration of a one-night stand. Earlier, Bates sits in a bar, talks to a woman, and buys her a drink. Despite the fact that the two evidently cannot even sustain a conversation without offending each other, they go to her place together, less out of any residual mutual attraction than from a shared compulsion to play out the ritual of the pickup. As they climb the stairs to her apartment, they are shown only as shadows. Virtually their entire night together is shown in a single shot, from a stationary camera, which is probably the longest and certainly the most striking sustained take in the film. On the left side of the frame is the front room of the apartment, its darkness broken primarily by the color television—the rest of the shot is in black-and-white—showing the Johnny Carson show, commercials, and, eventually, station sign-off. On the right of the frame is a doorway, bathed in a chalky light, beyond which are the end of a bed and two pale, almost ghoulish (and of course colorless) pairs of legs, coupling in various postures. Occasionally, their movements are punctuated by cursory moans, barely audible under the sounds of the television. The instant the action stops, the light goes off and light from outside bathes the room; hereafter, the man and the woman appear as little more than silhouettes. The man sits up and begins dressing and then, *Nashville*-like, calls his wife, for a hostile, aimless conversation. As the woman, unable to refrain from listening, wanders restlessly through the apartment, several times the light from the television radiates through her body, creating an effect even more ghostly than the stairway ascent. Finally, the

LAST CHANTS FOR A SLOW DANCE
(DEAD END)

television off, the apartment illuminated by rising and falling light from outside, the man finishes dressing as the woman, forced by the phone call to confront the fact that Bates is married, begins to nag him about it. Finally he leaves, asking "No hard feelings?" after the call has made such feelings inevitable. The woman makes the bed and then sits, alone in her empty apartment as the shot ends.

Here, the sense of temporal distortion is made explicit in a number of ways. For example, the presence of Johnny Carson's televised image implies a specific, pre-1:00 a.m. time slot. Later, within the same shot, the woman refers to things that were said "last night," and still later makes the bed as if it were morning. It is as if the events of the whole night had been completed in the ten-minute duration of that single shot; Bates's world has become so constricted and misshapen that even this tawdry interlude of human contact happens too quickly, its termination driving him back to his final aloneness.

Along with these major set-pieces, long, harrowing, aggressively disorienting, are a series of shorter sequences, of Bates driving through a bleak, generally empty Montana nightscape, the darkness broken only by lights that seem like abstract points in space, or looking futilely for work, or contemplating wanted posters. Perhaps the most revealing digression in the film comes in a funny (black-and-white, with only the reflection of a neon sign in color) sequence in a diner. Bates is sitting, incredulously reading an off-the-wall letter to Ann Landers. A nearby man responds, not with the expected chuckles of amusement, but with a snort of derision—"You read that crap?" The man then launches a bizarre diatribe, explaining among other things how such newspapers are put out by the government "to pacify the population," and how it is only animals, particularly amorous rabbits, who have "got it together." As always, Bates responds clumsily, and the conversation, though funny, is also full of the film's pervasive sense of broken interpersonal connections. This is true despite the fact that, in their common paranoia, the two men are kindred spirits. But there is a crucial distinction between them: the customer's comic monologue is evidence of his ability to give voice to his feelings of desperation, thereby partially defusing them into nutty—and harmless—eccentricity; what is most conspicuous about Bates is his inability to articulate or even recognize his own ill-defined hostilities. Finally, out of a series of banal frustrations, unemployment, an unhappy marriage, perpetually blocked communication, Bates's isolation finally, inevitably, explodes.

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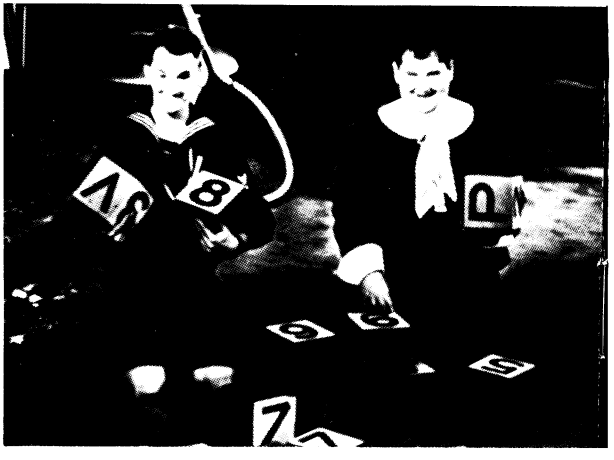
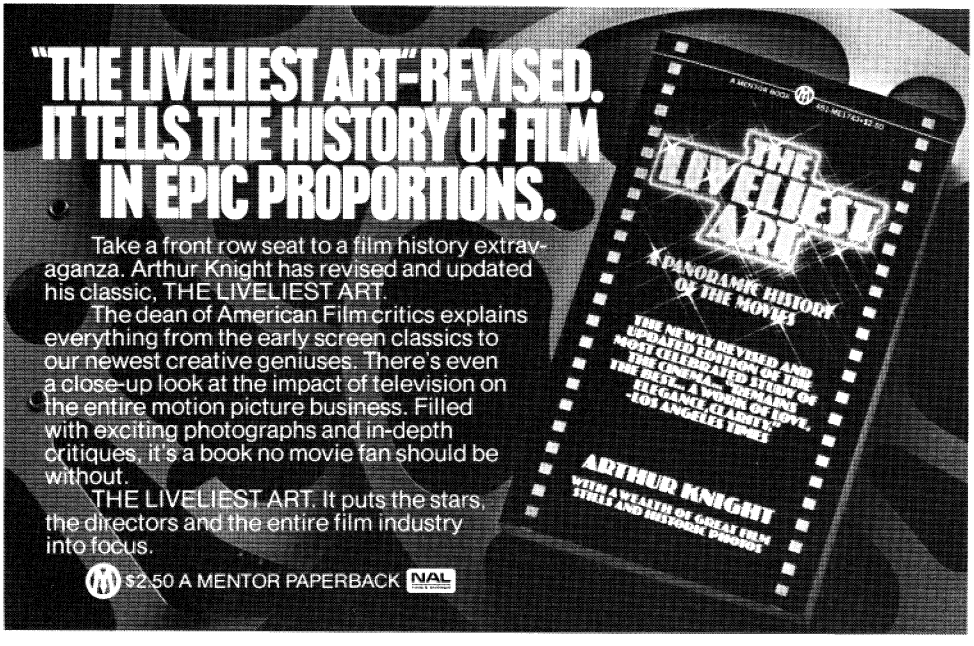


The actual explosion erupts with a violence that is disturbingly casual and mundane. In the warmest human interaction of the film, Bates meets a fellow resident of Butte, cheerful, garrulous, open, and a temporary victim of a (definitively American) frustration Bates should empathize with—buying a used car and having it break down. By now, though, Bates has become totally demented, and it is his own murderous intentions that create the sense of broken connections and misunderstood comments that had earlier seemed beyond his control. When the murder does take place, Bates is oblivious to the friendliness of the man and even the landscape, a beautiful wooded area that contrasts with the bars, diners, truck cabs, night highways, and tacky rooms he has previously inhabited. The entire sequence is, naturally, done in a single take, with the actual violence, rather like the earlier, equally unfeeling sexual encounters, presented obliquely and from a distance, the climax registered only by the sound of gunshots.

Despite the stylistic adventurousness of *Last Chants,* it is primarily a character study, and, as such, depends for much of its force on the quality of its acting. Aside from Jessica St. John's appropriately self-conscious Darlene, the rest of the cast is uniformly natural and understated, the performances almost invisible, closer to doing than acting. In view of the size of the film's budget, this professionalism is astonishing. Not surprisingly, the most effective performance is that of Tom Blair as Bates, moving from manic laughter to nervous foot-shuffling so adeptly he blurs the line between actor and character, giving the film something of the quality of a case-study documentary. *Last Chants* focuses on Bates relentlessly, but there is very little warmth or intimacy in the portrait; the character's paranoia compels him to guard against any acts of overt self-revelation, to others, to himself, or to the camera. The film, as a result, is not so much actively cold as impassive and detached.

A film that moves through Tom Bates's world is, inevitably, more than passingly unpleasant. Even the country & western music that punctuates the sound track comments on the action without re-



lieving the pervasive sense of futility. The unpleasantness achieves a culmination of sorts in a shot near the end of the film where the film records the slaughter of a rabbit (Bates has just sent his wife a postcard with a gag picture of a rabbit on the front). The camera lingers on the animal as its muscles contract in a grotesquely hideous reflex action that persists even after death. The automatic, hopeless quality of the motion could stand for all the action in the film, the rabbit for Bates himself.

Much of the film's force comes from its rigorous formal properties, the relentlessness of its long takes, the disorienting abruptness of some of its transitions. Watching *Last Chants* is a disconcerting experience, the harrowing intensity of the long takes almost aggressively unpleasant, the final muder almost self-consciously "unmotivated." But the very absence of a reassuring sense of conventional motivation—and therefore, order—is essential to a film about a man totally disconnected from his surroundings, his numbness preventing him from doing more than passing through the action, with the power to change nothing, to feel nothing, to understand nothing.

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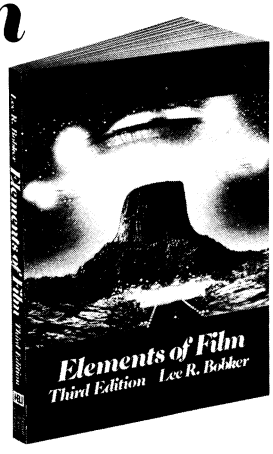

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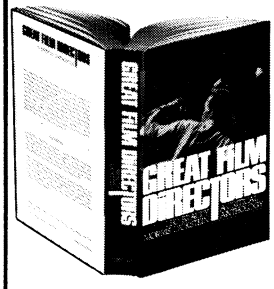

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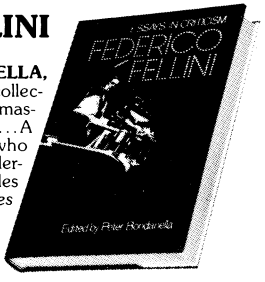

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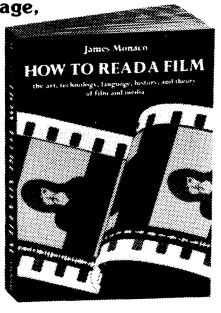

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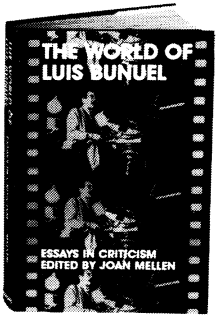

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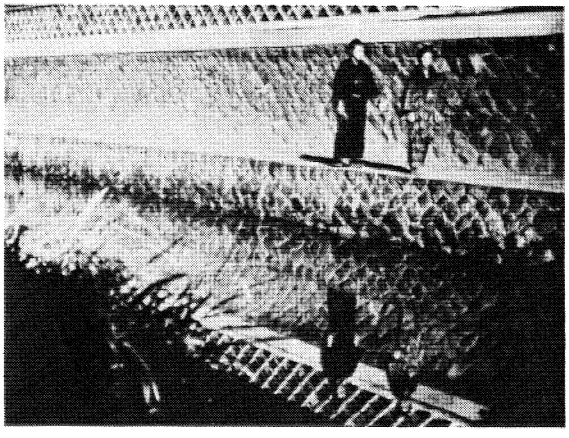

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